

Peter L. Embley

The Origins and Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren

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*THE ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT
OF THE PLYMOUTH BRETHREN*

by

Peter L. Embley

[late of TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.]

St. Paul's College,
Cheltenham.

August 1966.

{i}

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is entirely my own original work, and that it is not substantially the same as any I have submitted for a degree, diploma or other qualification at any other University.

St. Paul's College, Cheltenham.

August 1966.

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Introduction

In days of great oecumenical interest and a tendency to reject all forms of ecclesiasticism, the Plymouth Brethren movement has attracted a good deal of attention. In Great Britain it is primarily represented by the “Christian Brethren” – formerly known as “Open Brethren” – whose 1959 list of meetings contains some two thousand entries, there being perhaps eighty thousand active adult members. Their theology is a moderate Calvinism, they practise believers’ baptism, and there is a strong emphasis on the independence of the local congregation. All preaching and teaching is in the hands of laymen, there being no separated ministry, although progressive sections of the movement are beginning to advocate a settled paid pastorate. The Christian Brethren practise “open communion”, welcoming other evangelical Christians to their weekly “breaking of bread” services, and they are generally well-disposed towards oecumenical activity, particularly with other evangelical bodies. Public attention has however more often been focussed by Press reports, and even by discussion in Parliament, upon the activities of an extreme minority group, the “Taylorite Exclusive Brethren”. This group, whose numbers are uncertain although they probably do not exceed three or four thousand, is hyper-Calvinist, rigidly puritan, and highly centralised in its ecclesiastical organisation. It rejects all links of fellowship and contact with the outside world and even with other evangelical Christians; rigid group endogamy is practised, and where only one partner in a marriage belongs to the community, permanent separation is strongly (iii) advocated. Although the hope cherished in all sections of the Brethren of the imminent personal return of Christ in the Second Advent tends to foster a world-renouncing outlook, among the Taylorite Exclusives it takes the extreme form of the rejection of newspapers, radio and television, the refusal to eat a meal in the company of outsiders, and minimal social contact with non-members of the community. Almost the only distinctive points of agreement between the two extremes described are the fervent Advent expectation, the absence of a separated ministerial order, and the practice of charismatic or free worship – after the Quaker model though with only male audible participation – in the breaking-of-bread services.

There are a number of other groups of Plymouth Brethren whose social conventions and ecclesiastical practices are intermediate between those of the Christian Brethren and the Taylorite Exclusives, the largest in Britain being the Lowe-Kelly Brethren, whose ecclesiastical organisation is on the Taylorite model although their social outlook and doctrinal tolerance are much broader.

Part of the purpose of this dissertation is to examine the nineteenth-century beginnings of the Plymouth Brethren movement in an attempt to explain how two Christian communities with such apparently different ideals could spring from a common origin. These beginnings have always been shrouded in obscurity, and the study of the subsequent development of the movement has presented peculiar difficulties to the historian. There are two main reasons for this: the sparseness of documentary material, and the emotional involvement of most of the individuals and (iv) families in possession of historical information.

The extraordinary absence of documentary material relating to the early history of the Brethren may be explained firstly by their general expectation of an imminent Second Advent, and secondly by their complete rejection of any kind of formal ecclesiastical organisation. If human history may come to an end tomorrow, there is little point in multi-

plying historical records which will shortly be consumed by fire; far better to spend the remaining “time of grace” in preaching the gospel and in making ready for translation to heaven. The value of all human words – letters, documents, reports of meetings – should be judged solely in terms of spiritual and pastoral usefulness. The criterion “does this contribute towards the eternal salvation of the individual?” could be amply illustrated from the days of Hannah More onwards – and hence the practice, widespread in Victorian evangelical circles and frustrating to the historian, of publishing volumes of letters with names, personal details, and what posterity might conceive to have been the more interesting and controversial elements suppressed. The Brethren were not alone in holding this attitude, but in their case the position was worsened by their principle of minimal formal organisation. They claimed to be attempting a return to the New Testament pattern of church life in which high value was placed upon preaching gifts. They felt that this charismatic ideal would be compromised by formal ecclesiastical arrangements, which they denounced as “human systems”. This was the centre of their criticism of the institutionalised churches, which they felt “quenched the Spirit” by seeking to imprison Him within human forms of liturgy, ordained ministry {v} and administrative machinery. Their reaction against formal worship was so complete that to this day even the Lord’s Prayer is never used in Brethren public worship or private devotion, and children are not encouraged to learn it for fear that a form of words may become a substitute for personal intimacy with God.

The insistence on the principle of minimal organisation meant that there were no formal annual conferences or other official gatherings, so that no published Minutes or records of proceedings are available for study. Even the semi-official conferences among the Exclusives after 1848 were carefully presented as having been convened by individuals acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the Minutes taken were held privately. There were no lists of accredited ministers or preachers, since any male member who exhibited a preaching gift would be invited to exercise it among the local Brethren communities without the necessity for any kind of formal recognition or ordination. In practice those who preached were limited in number, and common consent would exclude a man who taught unsound doctrine, but there was a strong aversion to any suggestion of ministers possessing official standing. No organisation was established to control the ownership of chapels and meeting-places, which were always owned by individuals, though at a much later stage groups of Open Brethren established Trust Funds to control the ownership of certain properties. The only early periodical, the quarterly “Christian Witness” (Plymouth, 1834–1841) was concerned solely with propagating doctrinal and ecclesiastical views, and sheds light on the development of the Brethren movement as such, only by inference; nor was it in any sense {vi} an official organ of the community, since it was effectively controlled by a small number of self-appointed individuals in the meeting at Plymouth responsible to no-one but themselves. However, in the absence of formal administrative machinery, an informal power-structure inevitably grew up among the Brethren, centred in a few key individuals who exerted influence on the basis of their acknowledged spiritual and moral stature. Locally these were often men who by their previous social standing or their wealth had been most prominent in the founding of Brethren communities. Those of them most disposed to travel and to preach in different places, or to publish tracts and spiritual works, acquired by these activities a much wider informal authority throughout the whole Brethren community. This explains why in most sections of the Brethren, personalities counted for a great deal; and one of the happy results of this from the point of view of historical research has been the preservation, for sentimental or

polemic reasons, of a certain amount of material in the form of unpublished letters and personal documents.

This dependence of the Brethren movement upon the influence of dominant individuals is at the root of the second reason why the study of Brethren history is so difficult: the intense emotional involvement of the members of various sections of the community. Membership of one or other of these sections – notably the “Open” and “Exclusive” sections after the schism of 1848 – has carried with it definite and widely differing moral viewpoints about many of the events in the early history of the movement, which make it difficult to reach an objective understanding of them. The various “charismatic leaders” had immense {vii} followings, and it can hardly be denied that personal loyalties and antipathies often obscured the real issues at stake in the controversies. Although the same might be said of domestic battles in many other churches during the nineteenth century, the Brethren’s peculiar brand of spiritual idealism – which was often commented upon by opponents and even by their own more clear-sighted members – seems to have made them particularly susceptible to bitter theological and ecclesiastical warfare. Another result of this emotional involvement, especially among older Brethren today, is a cautious reticence about the unhappy events and divisions of the past, and a general unwillingness that the “work of the Spirit” should be subjected to scrutiny by unbelieving historians. Among the Christian Brethren, however, there is a growing healthy awareness of the failures of the past and of the continued relevance of many of the original insights of the founders of the Brethren movement. I should like to pay tribute to the great assistance and encouragement I have received in my research from many members of the Brethren, in particular those associated with the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship, whose fearless approach to matters long obscured by emotional overtones have done a great deal to clear away the mist shrouding the early days of the Plymouth Brethren.

P. L. E.
August 1966

Sources

Some description of the sources used in preparing this dissertation is essential, to amplify and interpret the bibliography given below, and in particular to indicate where new primary sources have become available since the publication of the one standard work on the Brethren, W. B. Neatby "A History of the Plymouth Brethren" (London, 1901). The three main sources which were not consulted by Neatby, but which have been used extensively in the present work, are the Sibthorpe and Fry manuscript collections, described below, and the individual Returns of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship in England and Wales, many hundreds of which have been scrutinised at the Public Record Office, Chancery Lane, London.

Many of the personal effects of John Nelson Darby, one of the first Dublin Brethren and the great leader of the Exclusive section after 1848, are carefully preserved among the Lowe-Kelly Brethren at Redruth in Cornwall; this "Sibthorpe Collection" contains hundreds of original letters to Darby and copies of letters from him, although the majority refer to the period after 1870. It also contains various personal documents which furnish incidental information about Darby's movements, and copies of the Wills made by Darby and George Wigram, a leading Exclusive. A similar collection of letters and tracts known as the "Fry Collection" exists among Christian Brethren in the Isle of Wight, and is composed of material from the personal effects of Benjamin Wills Newton, a young Oxford don who was involved in the foundation of the Plymouth meeting in 1832 and who was its leading figure in the period leading up to the schism of 1845 in which he and Darby were the main protagonists. The Fry Collection {ix} contains all the original tracts and works of Newton, who like Darby was a prolific writer, and a large number of original letters and documents. Much of this material was preserved for polemic reasons, and there is a special folder of letters relating to the 1845 schism at Plymouth, which will be referred to in footnotes by year and folio number. Of great value also is a series of letters written by Newton from Oxford to his mother at Plymouth in the years immediately preceding his alignment with Brethren. The Fry Collection also contains a series of letters written by Samuel Tregelles, a member of the Plymouth meeting from 1835 and a great friend of Newton's, although these deal mainly with matters of Biblical textual criticism. Probably the most important items, however, are several manuscript books containing Newton's unpublished reminiscences in old age, when he had long since left the Brethren, written down by F. W. Wyatt, a colporteur who spent some years with Newton. The most significant of this material, especially relating to Newton's connection with the Brethren, was collected by Mr. A. C. Fry, a member of the Open Brethren, in one smaller manuscript book which is carefully paginated and which for convenience will be referred to as "Newton Memoirs". The material needs to be treated with caution, since it was written many years after the events related and at a time when Newton's ecclesiastical views were strongly antagonistic to those of the Brethren; the dates recorded are vague and there are often apparently several accounts of the same event which conflict in detail. Nevertheless the Newton Memoirs provide the only surviving account by any of the participants of the origin of the Plymouth meeting of the Brethren and of the first services of worship held there.

{x} The recollections of John Gifford Bellett, another of the original Dublin Brethren, in a letter to James McAllister dated 7th June 1858, with later appended notes by Darby,

Wigram, Cronin and Stoney (all prominent Exclusive Brethren), circulated for years in manuscript among Exclusives, and were printed after Darby's death in an undated tract entitled "Interesting Reminiscences". The notes by Cronin and Stoney are dated July 1871; Cronin's is especially valuable for the Dublin origins, in which he participated, although he unfortunately gives no dates. An early manuscript copy of these reminiscences is in the Sibthorpe Collection; they will be referred to for convenience as "Bellett Recollections".

Primary material relating to the origin and development of the Brethren meeting at Tottenham, including early lists of those in fellowship and minutes of disciplinary meetings, is still in existence locally, but access to it was refused. Similar material relating to the Hereford meeting is available but was not consulted. Certain material, including a manuscript volume of J. N. Darby's unexpurgated letters and at least one volume of Minutes from the Park Street London metropolitan meeting of Exclusives, is said to be still in existence among Taylorite Exclusive Brethren, but access to it was not possible. A considerable amount of information was obtained from contemporary newspaper reports of religious meetings, secessions of clergymen, etc., especially at Dublin, Plymouth, Hereford and Hull, and from lists of persons and religious meeting-places in local Directories. Information about the origins of the Brethren in Ireland was amplified by consulting the records of the Church of Ireland (now held by the Representative Church Body in Dublin), and by paying personal visits to surviving Open Brethren meetings at Ballina, Cork, and {xi} Merrion Hall, Dublin; original copies of Darby's early anonymous tracts, while he was still a practising clergyman, were consulted in the Halliday Collection in the National Library, Dublin. In this library also is a historian's report on the surviving Powerscourt Papers, but as might be expected from an aristocratic family wishing to forget the eccentric religious activities of one of its members, nothing has survived which bears upon the connection of Lady Powerscourt with J. N. Darby and the Brethren. The original letters of Lady Powerscourt during the last few years of her life, expurgated versions of which were published with all names excised, do not appear to have survived; if they could yet be discovered they might shed considerable further light upon the Irish origins of the Plymouth Brethren movement.

The general viewpoint of the early Brethren can be judged from the issues of "The Christian Witness" and from the early published tracts by the founders, especially Darby, Newton, Anthony Norris Groves and Capt. Percy Hall. No British library has "The Christian Witness", but the complete bound volumes are in the possession of Mr. G. C. D. Howley and also of Mr. F. R. Coad, leading members of the Christian Brethren in London. Mr. Coad's volumes contain early pencilled annotations giving the authorship of the anonymous contributions; these have been checked and found to be accurate wherever the articles were published elsewhere, and there seems no reason to doubt the remaining ascriptions. Important light is also shed on Brethren origins by the tracts explaining the reasons for their secession published by various clergymen and ministers who joined the movement, especially J. L. Harris, Henry Borlase, Charles Hargrove, Andrew {xii} Jukes and Lancelot Brenton (all clergymen), W. H. Dorman (Independent), and William Trotter (Methodist New Connexion). These may be compared with similar apologiae by evangelical clergymen who seceded but joined other denominations – especially, in the same period at Oxford, Henry Bellenden Bulteel, J. C. Philpot and William Tiptaft. Other documentary sources for the study of Brethren origins include Quaker tracts connected with the Beacon Controversy of 1835–1837 and a monthly publication "The Inquirer" (London, 1838–1840) produced by evangelical seceders from the Quaker movement, some of whom subsequently joined the Brethren; the Minutes of the Methodist New Connexion

Conferences for 1841–1843 dealing with the Barkerite secessions, and numerous polemic tracts connected therewith; and various tracts connected with the secession of Andrew Jukes from the ministry of the Church of England in 1843. These domestic controversies all resulted in the accession of disaffected members to the Brethren. The M. N. C. Conference Minutes are now at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre, City Road, E. C. 1; “The Inquirer” in three bound volumes, and most of the Quaker and M. N. C. tracts are in the British Museum Library; the tracts about Jukes, which also provide considerable information about the Brethren meetings in Yorkshire at the time of the 1848 schism, are in the Hull Central Library and were consulted there.

The events of the 1845–1848 schism have been reconstructed from primary sources in the Sibthorpe and Fry Collections and from the contemporary publications from the various viewpoints: Darby’s “Narrative of the facts, connected with the separation of the writer from the congregation meeting in Ebrington Street”, “Account of the proceedings {xiii} at Rawstorne Street in November and December 1846”, and other tracts printed in *Collected Writings of J. N. D.* (ed. William Kelly), Ecclesiastical Vol. IV; William Trotter’s “The Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda”, the authoritative contemporary Exclusive account; Samuel Tregelles’ “Three Letters” in general support of Newton; and on the Open Brethren side Henry Groves’ pamphlet of 1866 “Darbyism: its rise and development, and a review of the Bethesda question”. The best objective contemporary account of the whole dispute, by someone who obviously possessed accurate inside information although not himself a member of the Brethren, was the anonymous “Retrospect of events that have taken place amongst the Brethren”, London 1849. This was accompanied by a companion tract “An appendix illustrating the Retrospect” which printed four of the “Confessions” issued by Newtonians who seceded to join Darby. These last two tracts are in the British Museum (B. M. L. 4135.e.36 (1) & (2).) After the 1848 schism polemic tracts – often giving only the author’s initials (a widespread Brethren custom) or even anonymous – proliferated; with due allowance for partisanship these furnish important historical information, and the most valuable of them are listed in the bibliography.

Biographical memoirs were published posthumously for several prominent Open Brethren, including A. N. Groves and Lord Congleton (J. V. Parnell), both of whom were involved in the Dublin origins. The “Memoir of A. N. Groves” prints a number of letters and is of considerable value, although the material is badly arranged. The connection of Francis William Newman with the Brethren in 1830–1833 is best illustrated by his autobiography “Phases of Faith”, written in 1850 at a time of scepticism. This work is also {xiv} important for its accurate appraisal of Darby at an early stage in his ecclesiastical career. The “*Collected Writings of J. N. D.*”, edited by William Kelly, a prominent Exclusive who after the schisms of the 1880s gave his name to a considerable party of the Brethren, contain a good deal of incidental information about the development of the Brethren. There were in all thirty-four volumes, many of which are still reprinted among Exclusive Brethren, arranged in groups under headings such as Expository, Doctrinal, Ecclesiastical, Prophetic, Apologetic, Miscellaneous etc. More important for the purposes of historical reconstruction are the three volumes of Darby’s collected Letters. These include many not represented in the Sibthorpe Collection; the dates and places of writing are given, and although names and personal references within the text are usually excised, they can often be restored with a high degree of probability from other internal evidence. It should be particularly noted that these “Letters of J. N. D.” appeared in various undated editions, with differing contents, and the page references in the footnotes to the ensuing text are from the volumes in the author’s possession, which are believed to be the original bound editions, c. 1890. A similar caution applies in the case of quotations from, and references

to, the Collected Writings of J. N. D.; all such references apply to the complete set of bound volumes in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge.

In the absence of official lists of accredited meetings, the Returns of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship in England and Wales are essential sources for estimating the distribution and numerical strength of Brethren meetings shortly after the schism of 1848. The Census Returns furnish information about places of worship and attendances on Sunday 30th March {xv} 1851. The Brethren practised weekly communion, and the great majority of full members, but few others, would normally have been present at their "breaking of bread" services; since these were invariably held on Sunday mornings, the morning attendances recorded on the Census Returns give a fair guide to the actual membership of Brethren meetings. Those who completed the Returns on behalf of the meetings only rarely described the congregations as "Plymouth Brethren", and often felt obliged to register a special protest in the "Remarks" column against accepting any denominational title. Catholic Apostolic (formerly Irvingite) churches often made similar protests, but the forms of words used are usually distinctive, and often the signatures reveal to a researcher conversant with Brethren annals which meetings were Plymouth Brethren. Study of the actual Returns was essential, because the Census Report, which appeared in 1853, contains many inaccuracies in its Summary Tables due to the difficulty the Returning Officers had in determining the ecclesiastical affiliations of groups such as the Brethren which refused to accept a definite denominational title.

Histories of the Brethren have been written from the standpoint of the various parties, the most important being the following: *Exclusive*, Andrew Miller, "The Brethren, their origin, progress and testimony" (1879); *Lowe-Kelly*, Napoleon Noel (ed. W. F. Knapp), "The history of the Brethren", 2 vols. (Colorado, 1936); *Open*, David J. Beattie, "Brethren: the story of a great recovery" (Kilmarnock, 1939). Miller's narrative of the Dublin origins is based on statements Darby made to the author, and is somewhat misleading; Noel's work abounds in hagiography and lacks perspective, {xvi} though giving some useful statistics; Beattie is especially useful in recording local recollections and domestic details about the origins of many Brethren assemblies in the British Isles. The *Taylorite Exclusive* history is concerned almost solely with the successive doctrinal schisms from 1845 onwards, and is entitled "The Recovery and Maintenance of the Truth"; written by A. J. Gardiner, it has appeared in two editions, the first in 1951 and the second, with many additions, in 1963.

In the last few decades of the nineteenth century, which were the hey-day of Exclusivism, a number of books about the Plymouth Brethren appeared which were polemic attacks by bitter and sometimes ill-informed opponents. Into this category fall the works by J. C. L. Carson, T. Croskery, J. Grant and W. Reid; not quite so unsympathetic are those by J. S. Teulon and E. J. Whately. Most of these writers' adverse criticism applies mainly to the Exclusive Brethren. Among contemporary works describing life among the Brethren by men who had left the community, two of the most useful are William Townsend "Church and Dissent" (1872, revised 1880) and Dr. Alexander Murdoch "Life among the Close Brethren" (1890). All these works are listed in the bibliography for the sake of completeness, although detailed study of Exclusivism after 1848 is outside the scope of this dissertation. In any case little can be added to Neatby's excellent description of the theological and social outlook of the Exclusive Brethren and of the character of Darby as their leader. Neatby's work is by far the most objective scholarly account of the movement, in which his family had been prominent as Exclusives, though his narrative of the origins and early development is weak through lack of primary material.

Chapter I

The background: evangelicalism in Britain in the 1820s.

(a) *The Established Church.*

The great majority of the founders and earliest adherents of the Plymouth Brethren movement had formerly been members of the established church in England and Ireland. This interesting fact may help to explain why there has always seemed to be more affinity between Brethren and Anglican evangelicals than between Brethren and other nonconformists. This affinity was, and still is, both social and theological: social, in the strong appeal to an upper-middle class suburbanism, and theological in the moderate Calvinist theology of both Christian groups. It has persisted throughout nearly a century and a half of the existence of the Brethren as a distinct Christian community. It is obviously very important in any study of the origins of the Plymouth Brethren to investigate the atmosphere of evangelicalism within the establishment in the 1820s.

The second generation of a movement rarely retains the fire and zeal of its founders, since the intensity of their insight is inevitably diluted by increasing popular support. Another inevitable result of success is institutionalism, for any organisation founded to further an ideal necessarily absorbs a proportion of the energies devoted to that ideal. These are fair general comments to make about the early nineteenth century inheritors of the evangelical revival. Their protest made, the evangelical seceders from the Church of England consolidated themselves {2} in Methodism and the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, and among the former energies were already being dissipated by domestic fragmentation.¹ In the case of evangelicals who had remained within the established church, the secession of the extreme elements reduced tensions and lessened the atmosphere of crisis. The crusading fervour of the pioneers gave way to the more genteel piety of men like Wilberforce and Simeon; "enthusiasm" waned almost in proportion to the increase in popular support for the evangelicals. In 1760 the evangelical revival was still represented in the established church by a persecuted minority of isolated individuals – Fletcher at Madeley, Berridge at Everton, Grimshaw at Haworth and others. Evangelicals enjoyed scant social acceptance and were often regarded with distaste by the upper classes, who particularly disliked the physical manifestations which often accompanied emotional evangelical preaching. By 1820 the "evangelical party" in the Church of England was an accepted part of the religious and social scene, and many fashionable people were evangelicals. An increasing proportion of energies, however, were directed towards holding public meetings, forming Committees, and founding Societies in support of social welfare or missionary endeavour. The value of a social conscience is unquestionable, and the subsequent record of evangelicals in the Victorian era is a noble one²; but this tendency inevitably siphoned off a proportion of energies which might otherwise have been directed towards basic evangelism among the unchurched masses of a booming population. Contrib-

1. {230} The Methodist New Connexion was formed in 1797, the Primitive Methodists effectively in 1807, the Bible Christians in 1815.

2. K. Heasman, "Evangelicals in Action", London 1962.

utory reasons for these tendencies were the influences of the so-called “Clapham Sect” and of Simeon’s long ministry in Cambridge. The Clapham Sect was an informal group of wealthy evangelicals which {3} flourished in the early years of the nineteenth century and which included among its members John Venn, Rector of Clapham from 1792 to 1813 and father of the John Venn who as Rector of Hereford figured in Brethren annals later in the century, Zachary Macaulay, Henry Thornton, and William Wilberforce. The high standing in society of the members of this group gave it an influence over both Parliament and public opinion out of all proportion to its numbers; and its successes in the fields of the social applications of Christianity – of which the abolition of the slave trade in 1808 was the greatest but by no means the only one – played an important part in gaining for evangelicals the mixed blessing of greater social acceptance. The other great centre of Church of England evangelicalism was at Cambridge, where Charles Simeon exercised an unequalled influence as Vicar of Holy Trinity from 1782 to 1836, especially in undergraduate circles, where his disciples were known as “Sims” and were noted for their serious demeanour and disciplined life. Simeon was moderate and austere in theology and practice; he hated controversy and liked regularity. Above all, he was a strict churchman. It had been the compulsory terminal communion which had precipitated his own “conversion” on his arrival in Cambridge in 1779, and he enjoined regular attendance on his followers. He was instrumental in keeping many evangelicals within the Church of England at a time when large numbers were defecting to Methodism.³

It cannot be suggested that the Christianity of Wilberforce and Simeon was anything other than sincere and whole-hearted, even if it sometimes appeared to be opportunist, tempered principle with expediency, and shrank {4} from idealistic excesses⁴. Nevertheless its very moderation, and the increasing support it received, contributed to the change in atmosphere among evangelicals. The pioneers of the evangelical revival had felt themselves gloriously liberated from the shackles of “formal religion”, and had endured criticism, lack of preferment, and social ostracism for the sake of their convictions. Each of them had experienced a personal spiritual crisis carrying with it the thrill of discovery, and they often stood alone amid misunderstanding and distrust. But in the 1820s a new formalism threatened: a formalism in which the watchwords of the evangelical gospel became commonplace to those who grew up with them among increasing numbers of like-minded people. As evangelical families and churches proliferated, the proportion of “sudden conversions” inevitably decreased, since children could be brought up under the constant influence of evangelical thought and language. Evangelicals of this generation had often not “discovered” their faith – they had grown into it from early years, accepting its orthodoxy without question. Simeon himself was forced to admit that conversion was often a gradual process – an admission which earlier evangelicals might have questioned.

The picture of evangelicalism about 1820 as a spent force, more concerned to hold on to its gains than to break new ground, is unduly pessimistic particularly in view of the missionary movement much of whose expansion was still in the future, but it has been commented upon by too many writers for it to be completely dismissed.⁵ It has been

3. Charles Smyth, “Simeon and Church Order”, Cambridge 1940, esp. Ch. VI.

4. F. K. Brown, “Fathers of the Victorians”, C. U. P. 1961, esp. Forewd. & Ch. II.
cf. H. Willmer, “Evangelicalism 1785–1835” (Hulsean Prize Essay 1962), Ch. II “Providence and Prudence”. (In Cambridge University Library).

5. L. Elliott-Binns, “Religion in the Victorian Era”, London 1936, pp. 49–51.

W. H. B. Proby, “Annals of the Low Church Party”, 2 vols. 1888, esp. Ch. 27.

{continued on next page}

pointed out that a whole generation of leading evangelicals became disillusioned with the party and left it – including Wilberforce himself towards the end of {5} his life. Many eminent Victorians had been brought up in evangelical households – John Henry Newman, Edward Pusey, Gladstone and Palmerston to name but a few.⁶ This disillusionment with evangelicalism on the part of educated men is mirrored instructively in the spiritual pilgrimage of Francis William Newman, the brother of John Henry, whose evangelical period included three years among the Plymouth Brethren.⁷ These strictures on evangelicalism hold true even though almost all evangelical churches could point to increasing numbers in the 1820s, since absolute increases were common to all Christian churches – except apparently the Quakers – at this time, being in any case swamped by the population boom.

Disillusionment with the stagnant state of Church of England evangelicalism contributed also to a renewed spate of secessions in a very different direction – towards Calvinistic Dissent – after 1815, rising to a peak in the early 1830s. It may not be unfair to compare the birth of the Primitive Methodist (1807) and Bible Christian (1815) movements, which represented charismatic protests against what was felt to be the stifling organisationalism and complacent orthodoxy of method shown by the parent Wesleyan body.⁸ At this point however a distinction must be attempted between theological and practical reasons for secessions. Until about 1815 the main points of cleavage among evangelicals had been over matters of church order and discipline. Dislike of the parochial system and episcopal control, with the consequent restrictions upon itinerant and lay preaching; desire for the ordination of men without University degrees; desire for the celebration of the Lord's Supper in their own communities of the converted – these were the matters, rather than any doctrinal {6} question, which had been decisive in separating Methodism and the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion from the Church of England. Within Methodism too, the schisms of 1797, 1807 and 1815 were over ecclesiastical issues, in particular congregational independency and lay control.⁹ Even the well-known doctrinal disagreement between Wesley and Whitefield was not now a burning issue; Calvinist and Arminian had learned to live together, and it seems probable that by the 1820s there was not a great deal of high Calvinism within the Methodist Churches. Even the Primitives and Bible Christians were largely Arminian in outlook. In fact many of the most powerful high Calvinist clergymen – such as John Newton, William Romaine and Robert Hawker – never left the established church.

From about 1815, however, seceding clergymen gave increasingly doctrinal reasons for their action in leaving the establishment, and it is clear that this renewed spate of secessions was largely Calvinistic. In 1814 there was a block secession of laymen from the

F. K. Brown, *op. cit.* note 4, pp. 518–9 et al.

W. G. Hutchinson, "The Oxford Movement", London 1906, Introduction p. xii.

Y. Brilioth, "The Anglican Revival", London 1925, pp. 40ff.

6. F. K. Brown, *op. cit.* note 4, p. 6.

7. F. W. Newman, "Phases of Faith", London 1850.

8. J. Petty, "The History of the Primitive Methodist Connection", Lond. 1860.

H. B. Kendall, "History of the Primitive Methodist Church", London 1919.

T. Shaw, "The Bible Christians 1815–1907", London 1965.

9. See a series of articles on Methodism after the death of Wesley, in the London Quarterly Review, beginning in October 1884.

Church at Kilkenny which led to the formation of a group very like a later Brethren assembly. Since the incumbent of the parish, Rev. Peter Roe, was one of the foremost evangelicals in the established church in Ireland, it is clear that the issues involved were domestic ones within evangelicalism. In the following year Roe published a tract entitled “The evil of separation” comprising a number of letters on the subject from evangelical clergymen, apparently including Simeon.¹⁰ In 1815 also there took place in Hampshire the first of a series of secessions by clergymen. The leading figure of this so-called “Western Schism” was James Harington Evans, late Fellow of Wadham College Oxford from 1805 to 1810. He became a Baptist, and in 1823 at [7] Islington as the pastor of John Street Chapel, was the instrument of conversion of Robert Chapman, later for many years the foremost figure in Devonshire Brethrenism. Evan’s (= Evans’) reasons for seceding were significantly different from those of clergymen who had become Methodist preachers a generation earlier. It was no longer simply a matter of obtaining a wider freedom to preach, but a crisis of conscience over doctrinal beliefs. Evans, like the laymen at Kilkenny before him, objected to the union of Church and State and the practice of infant baptism, not only because of the practical abuses which he believed followed from them, but because he felt them to be clearly contrary to the teaching of the New Testament, and inconsistent with the nature of the gospel message. He also objected to the absence of a genuine communion discipline in the Church of England, which allowed the careless and ungodly to participate.¹¹ This new doctrinal awareness in evangelical discontent thereafter increased, and in the 1820s and 1830s it led to the secession from the established church of at least thirty young clergymen – many of them connected with Oxford – and an unknown number, though certainly hundreds, of educated laymen. Many of them joined the Particular Baptists or, after 1831, the Plymouth Brethren.

It is a little too facile to explain these secessions as some Brethren historians have done, simply as a reaction against evangelical formalism, though there is almost certainly some truth in this assertion. Evangelical clergymen who left the establishment at this time sometimes waxed hotter about their evangelical brethren who “stayed in Babylon” than about high churchmen with whom they had much less theological sympathy. The irony of being “so near and yet so far” – of being “awakened” and yet not seeing the [8] inconsistency of remaining within the State Church – this called forth some of the strongest invective and the most impassioned appeals from the seceders, both clerical and lay, of the 1830s.¹²

10. Rev. S. Madden, “Memoir of the late Rev. Peter Roe”, Dublin 1842, pp. 255ff. “The evil of separation from the Church of England, considered in a series of letters addressed chiefly to the Rev. Peter Roe, minister of St. Mary’s Kilkenny”, with preface & concluding address by Roe; 1st edn. Kilkenny 1815; 2nd edn., corrected & enlarged, London 1817. (Camb. U. L.) The authors of some of the letters are not named, but Madden (loc. cit.) ascribes one of them to Simeon and another to himself. The influences of James Haldane and Thomas Kelly are mentioned in the accounts of the Kilkenny secession; see text pp. 33, 35, 37–8. Roe opposed Kelly’s teaching by publishing “A letter from the Rev. Thomas Scott M. A. to the Rev. Peter Roe on a publication entitled ‘A plea for primitive Christianity’ by Thomas Kelly”, Kilkenny 1816.

11. [231] J. J. Evans, “Memoir & Remains of the Rev. James Harington Evans” 2nd edn. 1855.

F. Holmes, “Brother Indeed – the life of Robert Cleaver Chapman”, London 1956, pp. 11 & 15–19.

12. e.g. L. C. L. Brenton (see text pp. 17, 19–20) “A sermon on Revelation 14 verse 13 ... to which is appended ... Remarks on the present position of the Evangelical clergy”, 2nd edn. Ryde 1849. (in B. M. L.) J. C. Philpot (see text pp. 15, 16, 19, 22–24) “A letter to the Provost of Worcester College Oxford ... with a new preface, containing more decided remarks on the national establishment, and on the conduct

Two other factors contributing to the swelling tide of secessions deserve mention. One which had prepared the ground particularly in the case of laymen, was the problem of maintaining an evangelical ministry in a particular church. This was often impossible when the patronage was in the hands of a hostile person who would not risk another of his incumbents becoming “serious”, and the next nearest evangelical parish might be some miles away – too far for regular Sunday commuting even supposing the home Vicar did not object. Sometimes, when all efforts to secure an evangelical successor had failed, a large part of the congregation scattered as soon as the non-evangelical incumbent arrived. There are descriptions of events of this kind at Reading in 1798 and at Wallingford in 1808, and they must have been repeated, perhaps less spectacularly, in many places.¹³ It was to avoid such occurrences that Simeon and other leading evangelicals began to buy patronages in order to secure a continuous evangelical ministry in as many places as possible. Their shrewd strategy in seeking to position these in places of maximum influence shows a foresight which hardly deserves the criticism it has sometimes received.¹⁴ Failure to achieve continuity, however, often generated large numbers of disaffected evangelicals without positive church affiliations, or at least whose former allegiance to the Church of England had been seriously and permanently weakened. Many of these “floaters” subsequently founded, or joined existing, Baptist or Brethren communities. In the 1830s and 1840s (9) Brethren membership was often gained from evangelicals who had left their Parish Churches because of dislike of a non-evangelical clergyman; a spectacular example of this was at Hereford in 1837 where it is said that more than a hundred parishioners seceded at one time, and in this case the incumbent was a moderate evangelical.¹⁵

A further more theoretical factor was that in spite of the conservatism and stabilising influence of men like Simeon, one of the inevitable results of the evangelical revival had been the minimising of the distinctions between clergy and laity and between churchmen and dissenters. Evangelicals found themselves more concerned with the distinction between “vital” and “nominal” Christians. This division might very well cut across both ministry and denomination, so that an evangelical layman in the Church of England could feel more affinity with an evangelical Baptist than with his own high-church Vicar. Such fellowship was made more common by increasing interdenominational missionary and philanthropic activity, for example in the Bible Societies, which were gaining ground against considerable opposition. The new awareness of the unseen line between the vital and the nominal paved the way from evangelicalism within the established church, towards the Brethren’s “church of the redeemed”, and lubricated the passage of many later seceders. Once the distinction was accepted, it was but a short step to feeling that the Church of England system was based on compromise, that its communion fellowship con-

of the evangelical clergy in continuing ministers of the same”, 10th edn. Lond. 1836.

A. J. Jukes (see text pp. 141–3) “The way which some call heresy, or, Reasons for separation from the established church: A letter to the Christians of Hull”, Hull 1844. & esp. 2nd edn., 1862 (see note 250).

For this plea from a layman, P. F. Hall (see text pp. 71–4, 96–7) in “Discipleship! or reasons for resigning his naval rank and pay”, 2nd edn. Plymouth 1835.

13. C. Smyth, *op. cit.* note 3, p. 238.

14. e. g. in F. K. Brown (*op. cit.* note 4) *passim*.

15. Pamphlet issued locally on the occasion of the centenary of Barton Hall; Hereford, 1958. See text pp. 129–130.

Other examples of this are mentioned in D. J. Beattie, “Brethren: the story of a great recovery”, Kilmarnock 1939; e. g. at Shaftesbury, Dorset.

tained chaff mixed with the wheat, and that many of its rites and ceremonies were applied indiscriminately when they should have been applied only to converted believers. These complaints, especially with reference to baptism, communion and the {10} burial service, appear repeatedly in the apologiae of the clergy who seceded in the 1820s and 1830s. Many of the seceders drew the conclusion that the evils originated in the union of Church and State, with its apparent implication that every loyal Englishman could claim the rights and privileges of the Christian, without the necessity for belief in the heart and practice in the life. The crisis point therefore came for many young evangelical clergymen when they found themselves legally obliged to baptise the children of profligate parents or to administer the sacrament to, or conduct Christian burial for, persons whom they felt had shown no signs of true conversion.

IRELAND

The impact of the Church-State issue on Irish evangelicals was rather different. In Ireland in the 1820s less than a quarter of the population was Protestant, the proportion locally being especially low in the south. Central and local government were linked closely with the Protestant establishment, and churchmen had a direct and compelling reason for their Erastianism in the immense pressure from beneath of the Roman Catholic masses. Fears of a recurrence of the 1798 rebellion, coupled for some time with the possibility of an invasion from France, made the Irish clergymen react to their insecurity by adopting an ultra-Erastian position. In the 1820s the position was made even worse by moves in the British Parliament towards Catholic Emancipation, which Irish Protestants felt would be a betrayal both theological and political. The juxtaposition in the minds of Irish churchmen between Roman Catholicism and treason is shown clearly by the Archbishop of Dublin's requirement in 1827 that Home Mission converts {11} should subscribe to the oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy – that is, to swear their political loyalty to the British Crown. To some evangelicals this requirement was an intolerable confusion of the claims of Church and State, and for at least one of the Irish founders of the Brethren, J. N. Darby, it provided the crisis-point of departure from the established church. The evangelicals within the Church of Ireland formed a small but active group among whom two of the best-known clergy were Roe at Kilkenny and Robert Daly, Rector of Powerscourt in County Wicklow and later Bishop of Cashel. The Irish evangelicals had pioneered the Home Mission, but its substantial successes in converting Roman Catholics in remote rural districts of Ireland were given an immediate death-blow by the Archbishop's requirement.

An interesting result of the special circumstances in Ireland was that the relationship of the Methodist societies with the established church followed quite a different pattern from that in England.¹⁶ Because of Roman Catholic pressure it seemed worse to break with the establishment. It is difficult to assign clear-cut dates to the formal severance of connections in either England or Ireland, but if the dates when the respective Methodist Conferences first officially allowed ministers under their jurisdiction to celebrate the Lord's Supper service may be taken as an irrevocable step, the severance would date from 1795 in England (the Plan of Pacification) but only from 1816 in Ireland. It is also noteworthy that division from the parent Wesleyan body was in Ireland for the purpose of keeping in closer relation with the established church – exactly the reverse of the tenden-

16. Proc. Wesl. Hist. Soc., xxxiv, pp. 63–5 & 73–5.

cies in England where the parent body was the more {12} conservative. Thus after the decision of the 1816 Irish Methodist Conference to allow celebration of the sacrament, more than one third of Irish Methodists formed themselves into the Primitive Wesleyan Methodist Conference (not to be confused with the English Primitive Methodists), which desired to retain closer links with the established church and so did not permit its churches to celebrate the communion. These Irish “Church Methodists” were to be found until much later in the century, attending their parish churches for communion, as well as their Methodist Society meetings. Meanwhile the previous practice of the Wesleyan Methodist Churches of holding their meetings at times which would not conflict with services in the parish church, began to break down about 1821 and the severance of connection was thus confirmed. In the 1820s, therefore, the thirty-thousand-odd Methodists in Ireland (of which about two thirds were in Ulster) were divided into Wesleyans and Primitive Wesleyans. Wesley had paid many visits to Ireland from 1747 onwards, and this probably explains why there seems to have been little Calvinism among the Irish Methodists. This in turn may explain why no connections whatsoever have come to light between Irish Methodism and the origins of the Plymouth Brethren in that country. Powerscourt Castle, which figures so prominently in the annals of those sections of Irish evangelicalism from which the Brethren movement sprang, is not even mentioned in histories of Irish Methodism.¹⁷

The situation of the discontented Calvinist evangelical in the Church of Ireland was therefore somewhat different from that of his counterpart in England, and the crisis point was often reached earlier, during the two decades immediately following 1798. The first significant difference was that he often saw the point of distinction not as in England between {13} the vital and the nominal, but between allegiance to Christ and His Kingdom not of this world, and allegiance to a politico-religious status quo. Second, partly because of the longer loyalty of the Methodists in Ireland, and partly because the only other large body of dissenters – immigrant Scottish Presbyterians – were almost completely confined to Ulster, there were far fewer existing evangelical dissenting communities as alternatives to the Parish Church. In England it was relatively easy for a disaffected individual or group to find a home in an already existing dissenting community close at hand, but in Ireland, except in Dublin where there were a good few back-street Chapels of various persuasions, the seceders generally had to start from scratch and establish their own communities for worship. This may help to explain why in Ireland there was earlier emphasis on the desire to establish communities representing the “true New Testament pattern” of a church. Such desires were strongly characteristic of both Irvingite and Brethren movements in England twenty years later, but there is much evidence that separatist groups of evangelical believers completely independent of ecclesiastical affiliations and often rejecting a separate ministerial order flourished widely in Ireland in the early years of the century. The secession from Roe’s church at Kilkenny in 1814 produced one of these groups, whose origin and distribution will be considered below. These Irish secessions seem mainly to have involved laymen; it would not be surprising if fewer clergymen seceded than in England, since in view of their peculiar political and social circumstances they stood to

17. Neither in C. H. Crookshank, “History of Methodism in Ireland”, 3 vols., London 1885–8; nor in the relevant portion of Townsend, Workman & Eayrs, “A new History of Methodism”, 1909, Vol. 2 Bk. IV ch. 1.

lose more. Nevertheless in the 1830s, when the dust of Catholic Emancipation had settled, several Irish {14} clergymen did secede to join the Brethren or the Irvingites.¹⁸

Another matter which requires comment in a description of Irish evangelicalism in the 1820s, is the spread of interest in prophetic fulfilment, not as in England in the first decades of the century among the labouring classes, but among the educated. This interest seems to have spread in the late 1820s, possibly stimulated by Catholic Emancipation and speculations about the possible identification of the Pope with one of the prophetic figures of the Book of Revelation; this matter will receive further comment in connection with Powerscourt Castle and the origins of the Plymouth Brethren in Dublin. Finally, the cosmopolitan nature of Protestantism in Dublin should be mentioned. There was more variety of Protestant worship available in Dublin than anywhere else in Ireland, and although sectarian divisions were not forgotten, it does seem that at least in evangelical circles the common dislike of Popery broke down barriers. There was a good deal of social contact and interdenominational activity, for example in the Hibernian Society, which sought to provide schools and Protestant scriptures in Ireland. It was from such social contacts between evangelicals that the embryonic Brethren meeting first gathered in 1829. Contemporary newspaper reports of religious meetings in Dublin show that many of the participants had known each other previously, and one of the first Brethren, Edward Wilson, was for a time the Assistant Secretary of the Hibernian Society.

OXFORD

To return to England, it is first important to notice that the evangelical tradition in the University of Oxford, while never so strong {15} as at Cambridge, has had a more continuous history than is sometimes supposed.¹⁹ In 1830 the austere and disciplined evangelicalism of Simeon was in its hey-day at Cambridge, but at Oxford storms were brewing. In the early 1830s several young Church of England clergymen with Oxford connections resigned their livings. Two of the best-known, who later became prominent figures in the Particular Baptist community, were J. C. Philpot and William Tiptaft.²⁰ Philpot was elected Fellow of Worcester College in 1826 at the age of 24. Postponing his Fellowship he went in spring 1826 to Dublin as private tutor in the household of Edward Pennefather, a leading Irish barrister (later Chief Justice) and a strong evangelical. Here he met Pennefather's brother-in-law J. N. Darby, at that time a Church of Ireland curate in County Wicklow, and through Darby's influence Philpot experienced evangelical conversion. He also fell in love with Pennefather's daughter, but having no fortune was ineligible, and he was replaced as tutor in spring 1827 by Francis William Newman, another Oxford Fellow, who was also dramatically influenced by Darby during his stay in Ireland. Philpot took up his Oxford Fellowship in autumn 1827, but banned from further College office because of his new-found Calvinism, he was ordained at Christ Church on 1st June 1828 at the same time as Pusey, and accepted the curacy of Stadthampton (= Stadhampton) near Oxford. In

18. Including C. Hargrove & J.M. Code (see text pp. 113–4) and of course J. N. Darby, who became Brethren; Edward Hardman (see text p. 90) who became an Irvingite.

19. J. S. Reynolds, "The Evangelicals at Oxford 1735–1871", 1953. This work mentions briefly all the seceders of the 1830s but there are a few errors of detail.

20. J. H. Philpot (ed.), "The Seceders", 2 vols 1930 & 1932. Darby recalled his influence in J. C. Philpot's conversion in a letter of 27/7/81: Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III p. 474.

1829 he commenced his lifelong friendship with William Tiptaft, recently-appointed Rector of Sutton Courtney near Abingdon. Tiptaft knew Henry Bellenden Bulteel, Fellow of Exeter College from 1823 to 1829 and curate of St. Ebbe's from 1826, where he gathered a considerable following of evangelical undergraduates. Bulteel's home was at Plymouth, and one of his friends {16} there was James Lampen Harris, also Fellow of Exeter College from 1815 to 1829. Born in 1793, Harris was a little older than the other men so far mentioned. Educated at Eton, his family connections enabled him to gain two successive curacies in the Exeter Diocese, first at Ringmore in 1823 and then at Plymstock in 1826. In 1829 Harris vacated his Fellowship on his marriage, but he returned to Oxford to vote for Peel at the famous by-election, met Newton and subsequently became a strong evangelical.²¹

The most spectacular public events of 1831 were connected with Bulteel. On 6th February he preached the University Sermon in St. Mary's Oxford. Since he no longer held his Fellowship (he married in 1829) and therefore did not have rooms in College, the preacher's procession left from the rooms in Exeter College occupied by Benjamin Wills Newton, a young lay Fellow whose home was also at Plymouth. J. N. Darby was staying with Newton at the time, and both heard Bulteel's sermon.²² In it he vehemently propounded the high Calvinist theology, stressing the irresistible grace of God and the justification of the believer, and indicting the Church of England for its inconsistencies and the University authorities for their laxity in spiritual matters. His attack on "concealed legalism" in the moralising religion of the University brought forth charges of antinomianism from no less a person than Dr. Burton, the Regius Professor of Divinity, and a vigorous exchange of pamphlets ensued which focussed public attention on the dispute. Darby entered the fray, originally under the pseudonym "Oudeis", by trying to show in reply to Dr. Burton that the teaching of the Church of England at the time of the Reformation had been Calvinistic rather than Lutheran. Bulteel's own sermon ran through six {17} editions within the year, and it seems clear that its dissemination had considerable influence on the subsequent secessions by clergymen.²³

In the summer of 1831, leaving St. Ebbe's in the charge of a young curate, a graduate of Oriel College who had been ordained in the autumn of 1830, Lancelot Brenton²⁴, Bulteel went with Tiptaft on a two months' itinerant preaching tour in the West Country. The two friends preached in the open air and in nonconformist chapels when the Parish Church pulpits were denied them. Tiptaft's letters indicate that both were prepared to be ejected from their livings as a result, and it almost seems as if they were courting this

21. {232} *Alumn. Ox.*; C. W. Boase, *Register of Exeter College*, p. 121; J. S. Reynolds, *op. cit.* note 19, p. 170; H. Pickering (ed.), "Chief Men among the Brethren" 2nd edn. London 1931, pp. 18-9.; *Exeter Diocese Curates' Licence Books*, in the Devon Record Office, Exeter; *Newton Memoirs* p. 184.

22. *Newton Memoirs* pp. 134, 239.

23. H. B. Bulteel, "A sermon on 1. Cor. 2/12 preached before the University of Oxford at St. Mary's on Sunday February 6th 1831", Oxford 1831.

E. Burton, "Remarks upon a sermon preached at St. Mary's on Sunday February 6th, 1831", Oxford 1831.

H. B. Bulteel, "A reply to Dr. Burton's Remarks ...", Oxford 1831.

Oudeis (i. e. J. N. Darby), "The Doctrine of the Church of England at the Time of the Reformation, of the Reformation Itself, of Scripture, and of the Church of Rome, briefly compared with the Remarks of the Regius Professor of Divinity", Oxford 1831.

24. See preface to *L. C. L. Brenton*, *op. cit.* note 12.

consequence. They received considerable help from local evangelicals on their tour, for example from John Synge, a wealthy landowner near Teignmouth, and almost certainly from Harris at Plymstock. Tiptaft returned to his post at the end of July, leaving Bulteel at Plymouth for a fortnight longer.²⁵ On 10th August, immediately Bulteel had arrived back at Oxford, Bishop Bagot wrote revoking his licence. For the next few Sundays Bulteel preached to congregations of over a thousand in his own garden in Oxford. He publicly renounced the Church of England, and subscription was started to build him a Chapel in Oxford. At the beginning of September he stayed with Tiptaft for a weekend at Sutton Courtney Vicarage, and preached on the Sunday morning in Abingdon market place to a congregation of two or three thousand. Tiptaft wrote on 5th September: "Next Sunday he will preach in my church, and after the sermon a collection will be made towards building a Chapel for him at Oxford ... He has bought a piece of ground at Oxford, and hopes to raise subscriptions sufficient to build a chapel."²⁶

{18} Thus far the story of Bulteel and Tiptaft is superficially not unlike those of the early itinerant Methodists, and a generation earlier they themselves might have become Methodists; but in Oxford in 1831 there was a much more radical spirit abroad, and a stronger Calvinist awareness. In addition, these tempestuous young men had no Wesley – and no Simeon – to restrain their enthusiasm. It is worth listing the ages of those so far mentioned. The following birthdays fell in 1831: Harris was 38, Bulteel and Darby 31, Philpot 29, Tiptaft 28, Brenton and Newton 24. Bulteel was the first to secede; he was baptised by immersion shortly after his secession, and while his Oxford chapel was being built underwent a brief but spectacular attraction to Irvingism which resulted in estrangement from his former Oxford friends including Tiptaft.²⁷ His own chapel was opened behind Pembroke College in June 1832 and here Bulteel ministered for some years. This congregation has sometimes been described incorrectly as Plymouth Brethren, but Bulteel retained a ministerial position which the Brethren did not allow. The first permanent meeting of the Brethren in Oxford, however, was formed in 1840 by a secession from this chapel, meeting first in Queen Street and then in Paradise Square.²⁸ Bulteel's subsequent ecclesiastical affiliations are uncertain, though he was certainly not associated with the

25. J. H. Philpot (ed.), "The Seceders" Vol. I p. 58 & pp. 164–9 (letters of Tiptaft 11/6/31 and 27/7/31).

Plymouth & Devonport Weekly Journal, 1/9/31: letter from Bulteel.

J. S. Reynolds, *op. cit.* incorrectly asserts that Harris was Bulteel's companion on this tour: p. 170, & p. 98.

26. J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 170.

27. *ibid.* p. 173, letter of Tiptaft 25/10/31; "Bulteel has been to London with Irving and his friends, and has some new views upon the subject of redemption in which I cannot agree ... He is fully convinced of the gift of tongues, and that the sick can be healed by prayer in faith."

Newton Memoirs p. 134. During Bulteel's Irvingite period, which lasted till 1833, he was involved in the miraculous healing of some women: "The Doctrine of the Miraculous Interference of Jesus on behalf of believers ... asserted from Scripture ..." by H. B. Bulteel. 2nd edn., containing two additional cases of healing: Oxford 1832. Bulteel's connection with Brethren and Irvingites is described in detail in *The Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*, No. 10 (Dec. 1965), art. "Irvingite Pentecostalism and the early Brethren" by T. C. F. Stunt.

28. J. J. Moore, "Earlier and later nonconformity in Oxford", 1875, p. 15. Even this meeting does not seem to have survived long, for there is {233} no Return completed for a Plymouth Brethren congregation at Oxford in the 1851 Census of Religious Worship. cf. J. S. Reynolds, *op. cit.* n. 19, p. 98.

Brethren; he preached at the opening of a “Free Episcopal Church” in Exeter in September 1844, and he died in Plymouth in 1866.²⁹

Meanwhile in November 1831 Tiptaft wrote to the Bishop of Salisbury resigning his living, stating fourteen objections to the Church of England of which the first was infant baptism, the second the burial service, the {19} sixth the expression “*our most religious and gracious King*” in the prayer for the High Court of Parliament, the seventh and twelfth related to the lack of discipline in the Church, and the thirteenth objected “to the Bishops having seats in the House of Lords, and to their grand and splendid style of living – both being directly contrary to the word of God.” He wasted no time in vacating his Vicarage for local lodgings, and in building a Chapel at his own expense of £555. Abbey Chapel in Abingdon was opened in March 1832, and there Tiptaft ministered for some years, mainly to a congregation of poor people.³⁰ He was baptised at Devizes in June 1832.³¹ Meanwhile Philpot’s adherence to the established church was weathering all these storms, partly because he had been away from Oxford at the crucial period. After an illness and nervous breakdown in September 1830, he left Stadthampton in spring 1831 to convalesce on the south coast. When Bulteel returned to Oxford from his West Country tour, Lancelot Brenton took over Stadthampton in Philpot’s absence.³² Brenton seems to have been a choleric young man and we have an amusing picture of his impact on the Oriel Common Room.³³ This account however is inaccurate in details; Brenton was at Stadthampton for four months, from August to December 1831. No doubt many theological rumblings came across the fields from Oxford, and when at the beginning of December Brenton had to bury the man who had been Parish Clerk for forty years, a notorious drunkard who died in black despair, calling down curses on all parsons (Philpot included), his spiritual crisis came to a head.³⁴ His last sermon on December 11th, an attack on the promiscuous use of the burial service, was quickly published. He moved to Bath, where in company with William Morshead, a friend who had also recently seceded from the ministry of the Church of {20} England, he opened a chapel which was not connected with any existing body. The facts connected with this ecclesiastical experiment are obscure, but it seems that either this chapel, or a group of seceders from it, was associated with the Brethren by early 1835.³⁵ Brenton had met Darby at Oxford in June 1830, he contributed to “The Christian Witness” in 1837, and it seems that he was associated with the Brethren meeting at Bath until at least 1849.³⁶ He succeeded his father as 2nd Baronet on 21st April 1844, thereafter being known as Sir Charles Brenton. It appears that in 1849 he

29. D. N. B.

30. “A letter to the Bishop of Salisbury by William Tiptaft, containing various reasons why he resigns his living and cannot continue a member of the Church of England; 7th edition. To which are added, three letters from the bishop to Mr. Tiptaft, threatening him with legal proceedings for preaching in unconsecrated places, and Mr. Tiptaft’s answers, 2nd edition.” Manchester 1834.

31. J. H. Philpot (ed.), op. cit. note 20, Vol. I p. 341 correcting *ibid.* p. 133

32. *ibid.* pp. 93–5.

33. T. Mozley, “Reminiscences, chiefly of Oriel College and the Oxford Movement”, 2 vols., London 1882. Vol. II pp. 114ff.

34. J. H. Philpot (ed.), op. cit. note 20, Vol. I pp. 93–5, correcting Mozley’s account, though Philpot overestimates Brenton’s time at Stadthampton.

35. See text p. 78 and note 142.

36. H. Pickering (ed.), op. cit. note 21, p. 12; W. B. Neatby, “A history of the Plymouth Brethren”, London 1901, p. 177.

moved to Ryde in the Isle of Wight, and he died on 13th June 1862.³⁷ Brenton's temper at the time of his secession may be judged from the opening words of his second tract, published at Bath in 1832 and entitled "Reasons for not ceasing to teach and to preach the Lord Jesus Christ":

"When Agag came unto Samuel delicately, Samuel hewed Agag in pieces. I know not why a minister of Christ should show more levity towards those inventions of men, which are directly opposed to the word of God, however ingeniously defended or softly pleaded for ... If any man point me to consecrated walls ... to popish canons, to lifeless and discordant Articles, and tells me there is the church in which I am to find the pillar and ground of the truth; I reply that he ... is helping to establish the dominion of Satan in the place of the Kingdom of God."

Morshead's tract of 1833 "Sectarianism" does not mention Brenton, but states the principles on which his church is meeting at Bath in words which echo many Brethren ideals:

"... a body of believers associated together {21} according to the clear commands of the Lord, and in expectation of his speedy coming in glory; without canons, creeds, or articles; without sectarian zeal, or party denomination; with no other power than that of the Spirit, and no other rule than the written word ..."

Morshead does however go on to stress the necessity for separation from, and theological witness against, those who refuse to take this position. His seem to be less liberal principles than those held by some of the other contemporary seceders. A significant footnote to his tract defines "heresy" as "especially infant sprinkling and Arminianism".³⁸

Another secession of 1831 whose connection with the events at Oxford is not so clear, was that of a man named Caldecott who attended Rugby School and Oriel College Oxford, was ordained in summer 1826 at the age of 25 and who became curate of Claybrooke near Lutterworth in Leicestershire. In 1823 Caldecott became acquainted with Anthony Norris Groves, later a prominent Plymouth Brother, and corresponded with him frequently; he also may have known Brenton at Oriel, though we have no evidence of this. Caldecott seceded from the Church of England in September 1831, later joined the Brethren at Bristol and died at Torquay in January 1840.³⁹

The next significant secession was that of Harris, who preached his last sermon at Plymstock on 2nd September 1832 and joined the developing Brethren congregation at Providence Chapel in Plymouth. Newton and Darby had been involved in founding this

37. C.L. Shadwell, *Registrum Oriense*; Brenton, *op. cit.* note 12, preface.

38. The five tracts by Brenton and Morshead are as follows:

L. C. L. Brenton, "A sermon on Revelation 14 verse 13 tending to shew the absurdity and impiety of the promiscuous use of the church burial service, preached in the parish church of Stadthampton, Oxon., on Sunday 11th December 1831", Oxford 1831; ——— "Reasons for not ceasing to teach and to preach the Lord Jesus Christ", Bath 1832.

W. Morshead, "Is the Church of England apostate? Being a Christian minister's protest on leaving the Establishment", by William Morshead, late Assistant Minister at St. Mary's Chapel, Queen Square, Bath: Bath & London 1832; ——— "Sectarianism – A call to the people of God in Bath": Bath 1833; ——— "The Baptism of the redeemer and the redeemed: The substance of a sermon preached in Bodmin in July 1833", Bodmin (1833). (The last is a tract in favour of believers' baptism.)

39. C.L. Shadwell, *Registrum Oriense*; "Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves", by his widow, London 1856: various letters to Caldecott.

meeting eight months earlier. Harris' action probably influenced two further secessions of West Country clergymen in the following year, Henry Borlase and Richard Hill; both joined the Brethren and their secessions will be described later.

Of the Oxford friends who have been mentioned, the man who waited {22} longest before seceding was Philpot. We may therefore hope that his reflections upon the matter were the most mature, and it is worth quoting at some length from the letter he addressed to the Provost of Worcester College in March 1835 resigning his living and his Fellowship. The kernel of Philpot's argument is the same as the awareness that lay behind all the secessions described: that in her liturgy and practices the Church of England was not rightly distinguishing between the converted and the unconverted, and was therefore being inconsistent with the teaching of the New Testament. Philpot begins by detailing what he felt to be the inconsistencies of the established church, especially that of unconverted members of its congregations taking on their lips in the liturgy the words of faith in Psalms and responses. As a clergyman he could not help feeling that

“the Church of England, in her liturgy and offices, was huddling together the spiritual and the carnal, the regenerate and the unregenerate, the sheep and the goats ...”

The situation being so, the only course of action possible for a conscientious evangelical was to secede:

“No other way ... have I to escape these evils, to ‘keep myself pure, and not to be partaker of other men's sins’, than by fleeing out of Babylon. Lastly, I secede from the Church of England because I can find in her scarce one mark of a true church. She tramples upon one ordinance of Christ, by sprinkling infants, and calling it regeneration, – (the word of God allowing no other than the baptism of Believers, and that by immersion,) and profanes the other, by permitting the ungodly to participate.”

{23} Philpot then lists a series of most interesting antitheses between the “true church” and the Church of England which sum up many of the idealistic complaints of Christians in the 1820s and 1830s – Irving, the Brethren, and even the Tractarians – that English Christianity had become too lax, superficial, and involved with secular politics. In essence this was not a new plea; it might have been written on the one hand by Huss or Luther, on the other by an Irish Roman Catholic during the worst period of Protestant repression: “The true church is despised, but she is honoured. The true church is persecuted, but she is a persecutor. The true church is chosen out of the world, but she is part and parcel of it. The true church consists only of the regenerate, but she embraces in her universal arms all the drunkards, liars, thieves, and immoral characters of the land ...” Pardoning Philpot his last exaggeration, there is no doubt that this kind of idealism, however impracticable the attempt to actualise the “redeemed community” might be, had a great appeal in the 1830s when most men were conscious of the immense potentialities in society for good and evil.⁴⁰ In the religious sphere this decade saw the rise of three idealisms – Irvingism, the Brethren, and the Tractarians – and Oxford from 1830 to 1833 figures in the story of all three. Philpot's high Calvinism comes through most clearly, however, in what he has to say about the evangelical Church of England clergymen: “They are for the most part compounding their sermons out of Simeon's dry and marrowless “Skeletons” ... the greater part preach only the first elements of truth in the mere letter, and are violently opposed

40. {234} G. Kitson Clark, “The Making of Victorian England”, U. P. edn. 1965, p. 86.

to the fundamental doctrines of unconditional election, particular redemption, imputed righteousness, and man's helplessness."⁴¹

{24} Philpot was baptised by immersion at Allington Chapel near Devizes in September 1835, preached there awhile, and then from 1838 to 1864 was minister of North Street Baptist Chapel in Stamford.⁴² He, Tiptaft and the two existing leaders Gadsby and Warburton, were the leading figures in the Particular Baptist churches of the mid-nineteenth century, which with their stress on high Calvinist doctrines, closed communion and congregational independency would not join the developing Baptist Union.⁴³

Some general comments may be attempted upon these events centred on Oxford in 1831. First, the common factor in all the secessions was repulsion from the supposed inconsistencies of the established system rather than positive attraction to an existing alternative, and the spirit of radical experimentation was in the air. Second, in spite of their theological idealism, the ecclesiastical destinations of the various seceders were largely determined by fortuitous circumstances – social contacts, financial support and opportunities for continuing to preach. It is true that Tiptaft and Philpot rapidly became associated with existing Particular Baptist communities around Oxford, and this ecclesiastical destination was influenced by the fact that for them the doctrines of election were even more crucial than that of believers' baptism; but one cannot help observing that both had many previous social contacts in the Home Counties where the Particular Baptists were strong. Bulteel was particularly well-known in evangelical circles in Oxford through his several years' ministry at St. Ebbe's, and it is therefore not surprising that support was forthcoming for building him a Chapel there. Brenton was at the time penurious, and it seems to have been a happy {25} coincidence that gave him the opportunity of collaborating with Morshead in a dissenting chapel at Bath.⁴⁴ The destination of Newton and Harris was determined by their home connections at Plymouth and by the opportunities for a new start afforded by the founding of the meeting at Providence Chapel there in January 1832 – a circumstance largely due to the financial situation of another Oxford lay seceder, George Wigram, whose story will be told in the account of Brethren origins at Plymouth. It cannot be maintained that any of the participants in the activities at Providence Chapel were at first aware that they were commencing a movement which would become a distinct ecclesiastical unit in a few years. These comments severely qualify the idealistic accounts of the origin of the Brethren movement which have long been current in the community. No Brethren history, Neatby included, has described the actual details of the Oxford secessions and the opening of Providence Chapel in Plymouth – nor has its date ever been accurately ascertained before the present work. It is almost as if later Brethren preferred to leave the beginnings of the movement shrouded in mystery to enhance their Pentecostal appeal.

A third and final comment may be made about the theology of the seceders. All of them were Calvinists – some more extreme than others – disliking the apparent inconsistency and compromise of the Church of England, and in particular the glossing over the distinction between believers and unbelievers in the indiscriminate use of rites and ceremonies. Also, all of them accepted the doctrine of believers' baptism, and although re-

41. J. C. Philpot, *op. cit.* note 12. Philpot's letter went through twelve editions in a year.

42. J. H. Philpot (ed.), *op. cit.* note 20, Vol. I pp. 132ff. Warburton baptised him.

43. A. C. Underwood, "A history of the English Baptists", Lond. 1947, pp. 242ff.

E. A. Payne, "The Baptist Union", London 1959, pp. 39ff.

44. T. Mozley, *loc. cit.* note 33, describes Brenton's penury.

cords have not always survived it seems likely that all of them were re-baptised after their secessions. Among the Plymouth Brethren {26} the question of baptism became an open one, probably because J. N. Darby always remained a convinced, though not an aggressive, paedobaptist.⁴⁵ Some sections of Exclusive Brethren still practise the baptism of infants. Newton and Harris were latterly in favour of believers' baptism; although no record has survived of either of them being re-baptised, Newton at least was baptising converts himself in the 1830s⁴⁶ and later wrote in favour of believers' baptism by immersion⁴⁷, while Harris as a member of the Open Brethren after 1848 shared their common belief in it. On the question of the nature of the Christian ministry, it is not easy to draw distinctions between the seceders. The Particular Baptists had a separated ministry, although it was seen as a matter of "gift discerned" rather than "office conferred" by the church, and there was ample opportunity for lay participation and democratic church government. The Brethren rejected the idea of a separated ministry, though in practice their system was no different, for those who preached were limited in number and known to the rest, even if they possessed no official standing. The only distinctive practice of the Brethren in connection with the leading of public worship seems to have been the impulsive free worship of the Lord's Supper, on the Quaker model, whereas among the Particular Baptists this service would have been led more formally by pastor and deacons. Nor is it certain from surviving reminiscences that this impulsive worship was the practice from the outset at Plymouth; it was not so at Dublin. In theory the Brethren did not have a settled full-time pastorate, although men like Newton, with independent means and stationary in one place, came near to this in all but name. In addition, one cannot help commenting that on the {27} whole the Plymouth Brethren were a much more affluent community than the Particular Baptists. The casual unpaid preaching system of the Brethren could therefore work, since there were more men of independent means who would not need payment for their services, whereas among the Particular Baptists the financial support of a congregation in a settled pastorate was normally necessary for a man to obtain a livelihood.⁴⁸

(b) *Calvinistic Dissent*

If the Plymouth Brethren gained the majority of their earliest adherents from the established church, it is equally clear that they gained most of their doctrines and ecclesiastical practices from those sections of the church which might be generally described as Calvin-

45. Darby's letters on the subject are brought together in two places: Letters of J. N. D. Vol. II pp. 54–61 & 327–350. Darby disliked entering controversy on the subject, and he was well aware that most Brethren disagreed with him: cf. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 236–8.

46. "The Inquirer", February 1838; see text p. 134.

47. B. W. Newton, "Baptism", 2nd edition, 1907.

48. For a racy picture of a Particular Baptist preacher see "A Memoir of the late William Gadsby", Manchester 1844. This gives a very human picture of life among the Particular Baptists in the 1820s and 1830s.

On the Oxford secessions, and other contemporary secessions by clergymen, see also Rev. Peter Hall, "Congregational Reform", London 1835, Sermon IV & Appendix Note L. The latter lists the names of, and tracts explanatory of their secessions by, thirteen clergymen who seceded between 1820 and 1835, including Bulteel, Brenton, Tiptaft, Harris and Borlase.

istic Dissent. Though not large in numbers, these sections were flourishing in the 1820s and were possibly in terms of proportional increases the fastest-expanding within the British church. A strong, persuasive and aggressive theology, with the promise of the assurance of personal salvation among the elect, and the citizenship of heaven, appealed to literal-minded people whose faith in the constancy of the earthly order had been profoundly shaken by the spectacle of recent events across the Channel. Among other factors the vast undercover dissemination of the works of Tom Paine spread doubts and fears about the stability of traditional society to which for simple people the quest for religious certitude was a not unnatural reaction. Religious assurance also provided an escape from the misery of widespread poverty in the booming industrial towns. (28) Increased literacy and easier printing methods meant that many more people could read polemic religious tracts, which proliferated with the spate of secessions by clergymen from the establishment. As already indicated, some of these apologiae quickly ran into several editions, particularly when their writers were prominent local figures or when printed replies were provoked, and circulation reached many thousands. Since the seceders were invariably Calvinists, it was usually communities of this theological persuasion which benefited from the resulting disaffection. In any case traditional Dissent – for example the Wesleyan Methodists, the General Baptists and the remnants of the Presbyterians – was suspected of too much political involvement. Many of these dissenters had become comfortable and prosperous, and especially after a major hurdle was cleared with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 their attentions were increasingly directed towards the removal of the remaining disabilities. The same largely applies to the Independents (later Congregationalists) whose traditional Calvinist theology had almost completely vanished by the 1870s. From the 1820s onwards their preoccupations were increasingly with the removal of disabilities, political reform, and education.⁴⁹ The Quakers were not so politically conscious, and during the eighteenth century they had become a rather closed community of prosperous traders and business-people, with little strong theological awareness or desire to convert the outside world.⁵⁰ In addition, evangelicals found it hard to forget the trend towards unitarianism which had affected many dissenters in the latter half of the eighteenth century; for example it seems that most of the accessions to the Particular Baptist community in Britain during the first twenty years of (29) the nineteenth century were from the Independent churches and were on account of Socinian tendencies.⁵¹

The Calvinists thus possessed the strongest theological polemic of the 1820s, and yet another social factor contributed to their success. The vast increase in population and the breakdown of the parish structure of rural life through migration to the new industrial towns accelerated the fragmentation of society, and amid all this traffic the old ideal of a unified Christian society was being rapidly forgotten. Conflict over many new social, religious and political issues, brought before an ever-wider and more articulate public through quicker forms of transport and new mass media of communication – many newspapers commenced publication in the 1820s – tended towards the formation of strongly cohesive social groups gathered round particular doctrines or ideas and cutting across previous communities. The prototype Trades Unions were one manifestation of this tendency, and in the religious sphere it underlay the great increase in the numbers of Calvin-

49. R. T. Jones, "Congregationalism in England & Wales 1662–1962", 1962, Ch. V.

50. R. M. Jones, "Later periods of Quakerism", 2 vols. London 1921; Vol. I Chs. II, III & pp. 314–5. In the 1820s the awakening of a Quaker social conscience was only just beginning.

51. e.g. J. H. Philpot (ed.) "The Seceders", Vol. I, 1930, pp. 1, 13, 17, 23, 39ff.

istic dissenting congregations in the 1820s and 1830s. Calvinistic Dissent included most Independents, the Particular Baptists, the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, a minority of Methodists and a number of smaller sects some of which will be mentioned later. While there was very little direct transference of membership from any of these groups to the Plymouth Brethren⁵², the Brethren did inherit many doctrinal and ecclesiastical ideas from the Calvinistic dissenters, which makes it necessary to investigate the characteristic attitudes of this branch of the church in the 1820s.

The two words which most characterise Calvinistic dissent at this {30} period, particularly the smaller sects, are literalism and emotionalism. Literalism affected especially the attitudes of evangelical Christians to church order and to eschatology. The latter resulted in an absorbing interest in the fulfilment of biblical prophecy, while the former meant that the attempt was made to discover and re-create the "true New Testament church order". Most Christians, and certainly all evangelicals, were agreed that reference of some kind should be made to the New Testament in order to discover principles for the organisation of the church, but the more extreme Calvinists went considerably further than this. They felt that the churches of Judaea in the first century A. D. should be taken as affording not only principles but an immutable pattern on which church order should be based for all time. There was no sense of historical development in the church; rather, much of church history was viewed as a departure from first principles. This idea took firm hold of the Brethren, who eschewed tradition not from ignorance, for many of them were educated men, but from positive conviction that such development had been retrograde and had obscured the primitive purity and simplicity of the New Testament church. The view of church history generally held in all sections of the Brethren subsequently was one in which the true apostolic descent was seen in the charismatic protesters of all ages – the Montanists, the Paulicians, the Waldenses, the evangelical Anabaptists, the Stundists; the Brethren saw themselves as the inheritors of these ideals.⁵³ Again a more general comment may be cautiously attempted. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century there was in England an increasing interest in, and nostalgia for, the past.⁵⁴ The historical {31} novels of Walter Scott, the romantic poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth, the rehabilitation of emotion in a world reacting against the "Age of Reason" – these things have been commented upon frequently in accounts of the background to the Oxford Movement; what may not often have been noticed is that a similar kind of nostalgia for the past was affecting people of a very different social background and religious persuasion. The three idealistic religious movements of the 1830s all capitalised fairly consciously on an awakening historical sense; if Newman eulogised the fourth century, Irving and Darby the first, at least the principle was the same. The romanticism of the Irvingites, like the romanticism of their founder, was of a particularly effervescent kind; that of the Brethren was much

52. There were a few dissenters in the original Dublin meeting; text pp. 54–5. At least two Independent ministers joined the Brethren: W. H. Dorman in 1838 (text p. 120) & Obadiah Atkins in 1843 (text p. 136); but there were far more accessions from the Church of England. cf. Neatby, *op. cit.* p. 125

53. Descriptions by Open Brethren of church history from this standpoint are E. H. Broadbent, "The Pilgrim Church. Being some account of the continuance through succeeding centuries of churches practising the principles taught and exemplified in the New Testament", London & Glasgow 1931; and T. W. Carron, "The Christian Testimony through the Ages", Worthing & Lond. 1956.

54. {235} See, e. g., art. "The Romantic Element – 1830 to 1850" by G. Kitson Clark, in "Studies in Social History", ed. J. H. Plumb, London 1955, pp. 211–239.

more restrained, but it was unquestionably present.⁵⁵ Thus it was that the Brethren felt they had a mission to recall Christians from the unscriptural “human systems” of ecclesiastical organisation which had grown up over the centuries, to the simplicity of the past. Such views of church order had not previously been widespread among educated people, but that they were not new is shown by consideration of the Glasites and the so-called “New York Correspondence”.

John Glas was ordained in 1719 at the age of 24 as a Presbyterian minister near Dundee. Shortly afterwards he began to think that the idea of a national Christian church was unscriptural, and in particular that Christ’s kingdom being “not of this world”, secular and political weapons were unlawful instruments of spiritual reformation. He published these sentiments in 1727 in a pamphlet entitled “The testimony of the King of Martyrs concerning His kingdom”. The views expressed in this are {32} remarkably similar to those of J. N. Darby’s first tract “Considerations addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the clergy who signed the petition to the House of Commons for protection”. This was published exactly a century later; there is no evidence that Darby had ever met with the Glasites or their teaching, though it is quite possible. Glas was suspended in 1728 and deposed two years later, whereupon he organised congregational communities in many places in Scotland. In due course the leadership of the movement passed to his son-in-law Robert Sandeman. The Glasites or Sandemanians attempted to reproduce literally the New Testament churches. Practices of foot-washing and the kiss of peace were introduced, the Lord’s Supper was held weekly – a most unusual practice in Scotland at that time – elders were appointed who were not necessarily men of education, and preaching and exhortation were held to be the duty of all male members and not the preserve of a separated ministerial order. Apart from foot-washing and the kiss of peace, this reads almost like a description of a Brethren assembly a century later. The Glasites were mostly of the poorer classes, though Michael Faraday was for a time a member of the London group. In 1768 in England, Wales and Scotland, there were about thirty Glasite churches, 44 elders, and 880 members. By 1851 the movement had greatly declined, but there were still six congregations meeting in England. The movement does not appear to have crossed to Ireland.⁵⁶

There is considerable evidence of scattered breakaway movements in the years between 1780 and 1820, leading to the formation of churches independent of any ecclesiastical affiliations, especially in Scotland and {33} Ireland. The origins of a number of these communities can be traced to the itinerant preaching activities of Robert and James Haldane, two brothers from a well-to-do Scottish family, in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century. After serving in the Navy, they both experienced evangelical conversion and in 1798 began itinerant preaching in Scotland. This was condemned by various synods of the established church in Scotland, and since the Haldane brothers felt increasingly that its communion fellowship was impure, they seceded and founded an independ-

55. See, e.g. “Letters of J. N. D.” Vol. I pp. 1–5; a pastoral letter from Darby in Dublin to the young church at Plymouth in May 1832, clearly written deliberately in quasi-Pauline style:

“Dearest brethren and sisters, Grace and peace be to you, and mercy from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ... Peace and joy and strength be with you all from the Father, in the Lord Jesus, in one Spirit. Let me hear that you are all well. Yours ever, even to better worlds, in the Lord.”

56. “Collected Works of John Glas”, 5 vols.

John Glas, “Treatise on the Lord’s Supper”, 1743; & esp. preface to 1883 edn.

Report of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship in Eng. & Wales, 1853.

ent church in Edinburgh which soon had 300 members. James Haldane was ordained as its first pastor, and other churches were opened shortly afterwards. Weekly communion and believers' baptism were later adopted, though the latter step led to a split.⁵⁷ In 1804 one of the Haldanes visited Ireland, and during his stay preached at Omagh, where one of the hearers was James Buchanan, a presbyterian who held the patronage of the church there, and who later served as British Consul to the U. S. A. from 1819 to 1843. When the evangelical minister at Omagh died in 1799, Buchanan had found it extremely difficult to obtain a suitable successor. After hearing Haldane he began to consider founding a new unaffiliated church, and in 1807 he met with four others on several Sundays in order to study the scriptures to discover the correct church pattern. From these meetings originated the church at Camown Green near Omagh, one of those whose replies were included in the "New York Correspondence". This church later became Baptist, but a group broke away from it in the 1860s to form an Open Brethren assembly.⁵⁸ Robert Haldane's stay at Geneva in 1817 resulted in the formation of an independent evangelical church there, offshoots {34} from which in French-speaking Switzerland became Brethren assemblies in the 1840s as a result of visits by J. N. Darby. Similar small and often persecuted groups of evangelicals which Haldane visited in the south of France also subsequently formed the nuclei of Darbyite assemblies.⁵⁹

On 1st March 1818 a "New Testament church" meeting in New York addressed a "catholic epistle" to similar churches throughout the world, stating that seven years previously a number of Christians had separated from the various denominations to which they had belonged, and had come together as a New Testament church, desiring to accept all (evangelical) believers into communion fellowship apart from minor disagreements in doctrine and practice. They believed that the first churches of Christ in Judaea should be taken as a pattern, and had therefore adopted the practices of foot-washing and the kiss of peace, weekly communion and the orders of elder and deacon. This letter was presumably distributed as widely as possible through personal contacts, naturally most easily in the British Isles. Twenty-two replies were received, all but one of them friendly and from communities with similar beliefs and practices. Of the twenty-one three were in the U. S. A., one in Canada, one at Manchester in England, four in Scotland and twelve in Ireland. The four Scottish churches were at Glasgow and Paisley, each with a membership of 180, Edinburgh with 250 members, and Dalkeith, and were known to each other. It seems probable that these four were connected with the Haldanes, since apparently one of the three signatories of the Edinburgh letter was of this name, although Paisley must have had earlier roots since the letter states that it was founded in 1795. Of the twelve Irish groups the two at Cork, and those at {35} Kilkenny, Londonderry, Crilly, Ballygawley, Monaghan and Camown Green each had less than 25 members, but the other meetings were larger: Waterford 40, Sligo 50, Dublin Stephen Street 100, and Tubermore Co. Derry 250. Most of the groups had been founded in the preceding twenty years, the last four named respectively in 1806, 1811, 1810 and 1807. Some of the letters alluded to other similar churches nearby which had not replied. The Kilkenny group had been formed in 1814 by a secession from the established church, although the ministry there

57. Alexander Haldane, "Memoirs of the lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey and of his brother J. A. Haldane", London 1852.

58. "The religious beliefs of James Buchanan" by himself, 1834. Reprinted during this century (but n. d.) as a tract among Open Brethren.

59. Alexander Haldane, *op. cit.* chs. XVIII & XIX. See text pp. 151-5.

was evangelical; this is admitted in the letter, but the cause of the secession is stated to have been the “corrupt practices of that church”. Unlike most of the other groups, the Kilkenny church had substituted handshaking and general hospitality for the kiss of peace and foot-washing. The two Cork groups had a common origin, but had separated in 1818 over the matter of liberty of ministry, some feeling it right to appoint one person to lead worship and others desiring that this should be open to every male member. One of the Camown Green signatories was John Buchanan, brother of James. Only five of the twelve Irish groups were in Ulster – Londonderry, Crilly, Monaghan, Camown Green and Tubermore – which in view of the much higher proportion of Protestants there lends weight to the interpretation of the secessions suggested earlier. There is a complete lack of prophetic interest in the letters, which seems to justify drawing a sharp distinction between the ideals of these small bodies of evangelical believers, literalist as they were in some respects, and those of the millenarian groups which were arising in parts of English industrial society at the same time.⁶⁰ In the letters of the New York Correspondence, all the {36} emphasis is laid on the attempt to re-establish the New Testament church order, and on the desire for a true Christian unity untrammelled by minor denominational disagreements. The whole correspondence, with a reply letter from the New York church, was published by that church in 1820. The son of an elder at Kilkenny later came into contact with the Open Brethren, and an 1889 reprint of the correspondence circulated as a tract among them.⁶¹

Although direct historical connection with a later Brethren assembly can be conclusively proved in only one case, that of Camown Green, the existence of these unaffiliated groups of evangelical believers provides an interesting background to the Irish origins of the Plymouth Brethren. It demonstrates that the ideas which later found their ecclesiastical expression in the Brethren movement were widespread in Ireland in the early nineteenth century. This fact has been over-stressed by some Brethren historians in their account of the movement’s origins, but what is certainly true is that the development of the Brethren as a self-conscious community resulted from the confluence of similar ideas with a particular situation – the disaffection caused by the Oxford secessions and with men of imagination and organising ability. Among the early adherents of the movement at least J. N. Darby, the leading architect of the Plymouth Brethren as an ecclesiastical entity, was aware of the existence of the Irish unaffiliated churches, since he referred to them in a letter to Plymouth written in April 1833.⁶²

Two other contemporary Irish sects which were sometimes erroneously thought to have had direct links with the original Brethren were Walkerism {37} and Kellyism. Both were numerically small, and contained little power of propagation, for neither long survived the death of its founder. John Walker was born in January 1768 at Roscommon and died in Dublin on 25th October 1833. He was the son of a Church of Ireland clergyman, and went up to Trinity College Dublin in 1785, where he became a Fellow in 1791. About 1800 he was for a time Chaplain of Bethesda Chapel in Dublin, the erstwhile headquar-

60. On the “fanatic fringe”, see Edward Thompson, “The making of the English working class”, 1963, pp. 116–120, 382–392, 797–803.

61. “Letters concerning their principles and order, from assemblies of believers in 1818–1820”, reprinted in 1889. (Copy of this tract in the possession of Mr. F. R. Coad). The Edinburgh letter is unsigned in the reprint, but the one from Dalkeith seems to refer to it (in disagreement over the practice of the “kiss of charity”, which Edinburgh had adopted) as “the letter signed by Haldane and two others”.

62. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 21. “I hear the north is dotted with little bodies, meeting as you do, though I do not know the places.”

ters of Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon in the Irish capital. He was by this time an extreme Calvinist, and in due course rejecting the idea of a clerical order, he informed the Provost of Trinity of his views and was expelled in October 1804. He joined a congregation in Stafford Street, Dublin, where his followers styled themselves “the church of God” but were known by others as Walkerites. Walker paid visits to Scotland, and lived in London from 1819 to 1833, returning to Dublin shortly before his death. His principles of church fellowship were extremely narrow, and in 1834 there were only three recognised Walkerite churches, in Portsmouth Street London, Exchange Leith, and at the Rotunda Dublin. As with other unaffiliated sects at this time, the experimental nature of Walkerism is partly shown by the unconscious conservatism implied in the retention of the practice of infant baptism. Walker’s reasons for this did not convince James Buchanan, who visited Dublin in 1807 to see him and obtain advice and guidance for the benefit of his embryonic church at Camown Green.⁶³

Thomas Kelly lived from 1769 to 1855 and was the son of an Irish judge. In 1792 he was ordained and was for a time a convinced evangelical within the Church of Ireland, but partly as a result of restrictions {38} placed by the ecclesiastical authorities on his evangelistic preaching in Dublin, he seceded and established independent churches in various places in Ireland. Kelly had ample means, which enabled him to build churches at Athy (where he acted as pastor himself), Portarlington, Wexford, Waterford and other places. In these churches there was a recognised eldership, but no formal ordination or exclusive ministry, and believers’ baptism was practised. Like the Oxford seceders, Kelly thought it important that believers and unbelievers should be practically distinguished in worship, to avoid confusion.⁶⁴ That the resulting fellowship was more amiable than that of the Walkerites is indicated by the possibly apocryphal story that when a merger between the two groups was being discussed, the negotiations finally broke down when the Kellyites refused to concede as an article of faith on which the Walkerites insisted, that John Wesley was in hell.⁶⁵ The story is not so unlikely as it sounds, in view of Wesley’s polemic hymns in favour of general atonement, and the rabid Calvinism of the Walkerites; Wesley’s destination was a live issue among extreme Calvinists, and B. W. Newton recorded his disgust on hearing Wesley’s probable damnation being discussed at an Oxford dinner-table about 1831.⁶⁶ Kelly became a most prolific hymn-writer, the 1853 edition of his work containing 765 hymns. A considerable number of these found their way into Brethren hymn-books, and in the 1881 edition (edited by Darby) in use among Exclusive Brethren, 35 out of 426

63. D.N.B. art. on Walker and its bibl.

“Letters on primitive Christianity, in which are set forth the faith & practice of the apostolic churches, by a member of the religious body commonly called separatists”, Dublin 1834: anon. but ascribed to Walker; the first letter dated 15/1/19. This tract lists various publications accredited among the Walkerites & then states; “Churches – holding the {236} views contained in the above publications – assemble in Portsmouth Street London, Exchange Leith and at the Rotunda Dublin.”

Buchanan’s visit to see Walker in James Buchanan, op. cit. note 58.

64. “A letter to the Rev. William Burgh in answer to his ‘Letter to a clergyman’.” Dublin 1833; anon. but ascribed to Thomas Kelly. This long letter gives an authoritative statement of Kellyite church order, stressing the importance of the visible distinction of believers in worship, an appointed eldership though not an exclusive ministry, and the duty of mutual exhortation in the church. There are many close parallels with Brethren principles of worship.

Joseph Miller, “Singers & Songs of the Church”, 2nd ed. Lond. 1869, pp. 337–8.

65. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, p. 27.

66. Newton Memoirs p. 134.

hymns were by Kelly, a remarkable total considering that he was never a member of the Brethren and that they preferred to write their own hymns. Only the 44 by J. G. Deck, a member of the Brethren from early days, beat Kelly's total, and only {39} fifteen of Darby's own hymns were included.

The early Brethren knew of the existence of these sects, but felt that the basis of their communion fellowship was not wide enough. There is a hostile reference on these grounds to the Glasite and Walkerite communities, in an important letter written to Darby by A. N. Groves on 10th March 1836.⁶⁷

The other strand to literalism was in the realm of eschatology and prophetic interpretation. Literalism in biblical studies was by no means confined to the uneducated, for England was still completely untouched by German critical thought, but in the early 1820s prophetic interest was most widespread among the lower classes of society. There was a spreading belief that the return of Christ in judgement might be imminent and the "time of grace" therefore short.⁶⁸ The great majority of Christians still believed in a literal hell, and aimed to avoid its terrors and gain the joys of heaven. This preoccupation was probably most articulate among the labouring classes, where the hope of future happiness provided an emotional compensation for present hardships. It seems likely that the importance of eschatology in nineteenth century religion was generated in part by the high death-rate in these classes of society; in 1845 the average life-span of a labourer was in London 22 years, in Manchester 17 years, and in Liverpool only 15 years.⁶⁹ Calvinistic dissent tailed off at its lower extremities into various fanatical millenarian sects, of which the best-known was probably that connected with Joanna Southcott. Born in 1750 the daughter of a Devon farmer, she proclaimed in 1792 that she was the woman of Revelation 12 and began to seal the elect for a {40} suitable fee. After her death in 1814 just before she was to have given birth miraculously to "the Prince of Peace", the movement was kept alive by her followers, who numbered several thousands in many parts of England. An offshoot was the "Christian Israelites", founded in 1822 by John Wroe of Bowling. That such a sect could attract so much attention and support is some indication of the intense eschatological interest in parts of English society in the 1820s.⁷⁰ For example, there was a flourishing congregation of "Joannaites" (Southcottians) in industrial Sheffield in 1821.⁷¹ What was new in Brethrenism and Irvingism in the 1830s was the spread of this prophetic interest among educated upper-class people. A good deal of the credit for this must go to Edward Irving and Henry Drummond; Brethrenism absorbed its eschatology from this source.

Edward Irving was born at Annan in 1792, and became a minister of the Church of Scotland. His first post was as assistant to Rev. Thomas Chalmers at Glasgow in 1819, and

67. See text pp. 115–8.

68. For an excellent review of the 19th century development of prophetic interpretation, see Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Occasional Paper No. 2, "Prophetic Developments", by F. R. Coad, 1966. See also LeRoy Edwin Froom, "The Prophetic Faith of our fathers", 4 vols. Washington D. C. 1954–, esp. vol. iv.

69. "Report on the state of large towns", 1845. Quoted, with comment, by R. F. Wearmouth, "Methodism and the Trade Unions", 1959, p. 24.

70. G. R. Balleine, "Past finding out", 1956. Panel advertisements asking the Bishops to open Joanna Southcott's box of "sealed prophecies" (which is presumably still in existence) still appear regularly in several national daily newspapers.

71. T. Ramsay, "The Picture of Sheffield", 1824, p. 155.

on 16th October 1822 he was inducted as minister at the Caledonian Chapel in Hatton Garden, London. Here he rapidly gained a reputation for brilliant oratory, and after Canning's mention of him in Parliament, fashionable visitors crowded the small and dingy Chapel. He was a rhetorician rather than a doctrinal preacher, and the effect of his preaching was to dazzle rather than to convince and convert. It was said of him "Mr. Irving feels more than he reasons". In this early London ministry Irving appealed because he was the Romantic in the pulpit at a time when much of the evangelicalism of the established church was either fashionable and prosaic or austere and unimaginative. He was a close friend of Coleridge, and it was partly the latter's view that the preacher {41} is the "sensible voice of the Holy Spirit" which paved the way towards Irving's later belief in the restoration of apostolic gifts to the church. Although Irving was a University-educated man, his emotionalism and vividly imaginative character were not likely to lead to a restrained and balanced ministry when he was uprooted from the moderating influence of his native Scottish Calvinist background and set in an intellectual and fashionable London society. His late senior at Glasgow noted the ominous signs of instability as early as 1827 when he visited London to preach at Irving's induction to the new Scottish Church in Regent Square. However his Calvinist background ensured that his preaching retained the basic emphases of human sinfulness, the efficacy of the atonement, and the necessity for conversion and the new life in Christ, so that at first he was held in high esteem by evangelicals. His lack of stature as a systematic theologian was largely responsible for the heresy-hunt over his doctrine of the human nature of Christ, which crystallised in a pamphlet war with James Haldane in 1830–1831. Irving's unorthodox doctrine was of the sinfulness of Christ's human nature, though he maintained that Christ never in fact sinned; it was for this teaching that he was most strongly condemned by the early Brethren, and it led in 1830 to his excommunication by his London presbytery and finally in 1833 to the deprivation of his Orders by the Annan presbytery which had ordained him. By 1833 there was also considerable opposition to him because of the outbreak of "tongues" (glossolalia), the appearance of which had been directly connected with Irving's intense prophetic interest and belief in the imminence of the Second Coming of Christ.

{42} In 1826 Irving attended the first of the Albury Conferences, which were convened annually at Advent for the study of biblical prophecy, by Henry Drummond, a wealthy Tory M. P. The Conferences were held at Albury Park, Drummond's country seat six miles east of Guildford, and nearly half the forty evangelicals who attended the first of them were clergymen of the established church. One of the original and strongest supporters was Rev. Hugh McNeile, the Rector of Albury. Almost from the beginning it was decided that contemporary events indicated the imminence of the return of Christ, and a good deal of "date-fixing" was indulged in, this causing the estrangement of some of the original supporters. In 1827 Irving published his translation of the work of a Spanish Jesuit named Lacunza, which had originally appeared in 1812 under the pseudonym Ben Ezra, entitled "The Coming of the Messiah in glory and majesty". This put forward not the traditional preterist or historicist views of prophetic fulfilment, but the futurist view that many of the prophecies of the Books of Daniel and Revelation were still unfulfilled, and that Christ's literal return to earth in judgement and glory to set up His kingdom might be expected. From 1829 to 1833 there appeared in connection with the Albury Park group a quarterly review of prophetic subjects entitled "The Morning Watch". This was published largely at the expense of Drummond, and was edited by a Mr. Tudor who later held high office in the Catholic Apostolic Church. It was practically speaking the mouthpiece of the Irvingite movement, and as far as the focussing of interest and the disseminating of views go, it may be closely compared with "The Christian Witness" of the

Plymouth Brethren which appeared quarterly from 1834 to 1841. There was a heady expectancy {43} in the Drummond circle, and when in April 1830 cases of glossolalia and spiritual healing occurred at Row, near Glasgow, Irving at once accepted them as genuine signs of the approaching end. News of the manifestations was brought on the last day of the last Albury meeting, in July 1830, and delegates were sent north to investigate.

In April 1831 the “tongues” appeared in Irving’s Regent Square church, but at first only in private prayer meetings; the first utterances in public worship were on 16th October, and on 26th April 1832 Irving was deposed from his pulpit. Eight hundred of his congregation followed him, first to a bazaar in Grays Inn Road which he shared with Robert Owen, and finally in autumn 1832 to a church in Newman Street. Here the organisation of the Catholic Apostolic Church (this was meant to be a literal description rather than a denominational title) crystallised, although Irving took a decreasing part in the later stages, since after the deprivation of his orders in 1833 he was accorded, at the dictates of the “voice of the Spirit”, only an inferior rank in the sect he had founded. Deserted by most of his former evangelical friends, he died in December 1834 sadly declined in spirits and in health. However, the organisation of his church had clarified somewhat before his death. It was based upon the re-establishment of a charismatically-appointed hierarchy to rule the church in the short time remaining before the end. At the head of this were twelve “apostles” or “angels”, of whom Henry Drummond was one, and below there were prophets, evangelists and others. This organisation was supposedly based literally on the pattern of the New Testament churches, the aim being to return to “primitive purity” in order to be ready for the {44} Lord when He came. At this stage evangelism was quite incidental, though later in the century some missionaries were sent out, particularly to the Continent of Europe. The type of devotion engendered in the Catholic Apostolic Church was at first an ultra-emotional one in which worship and preaching was frequently interrupted by “Spirit utterances” in English or in unintelligible languages (for which interpretation was generally given) and in which services for spiritual healing were held. Later a more formal liturgy was evolved containing elements of Catholic and Orthodox pietism, probably added as a result of the missionaries’ Continental travels.⁷²

The relationship between the developing Brethrenism and Irvingism merits careful attention in view of their many common features and contemporaneous origins.⁷³ They shared an intense expectation of the imminent return of Christ, and a propensity for treating parts of the Bible as obscure timetables to which the key should be sought. Also, both set out to re-create the New Testament church order, though this led to differences in practice. The crucial difference was that while prophetic studies were an important secondary interest for the Brethren, they laid the greatest emphasis on realising the unity of Christian believers, whereas for the Irvingites prophecy was the *raison d’être* of their whole system. The expansion of the Catholic Apostolic Church was greatest in the decade 1831–1841, when sixteen churches were opened in England and Wales as opposed to five in the following decade. This decline compares with a steady increase in the number of Brethren places of worship, of which 17 were opened between 1831 and 1841, and 54 in the next decade. By 1851 there were four times as many Brethren meeting-places in Eng-

72. Mrs. F. W. Oliphant, “A life of Edward Irving”, 2 vols. 1862.

A. L. Drummond, “Edward Irving and his circle”, London 1938.

“The Morning Watch”, *passim*; F. R. Coad, art. cit. note 68.

73. This is the main purpose of T. C. F. Stunt, art. cit. note 27.

land and Wales {45} as there were Irvingite churches.⁷⁴ By staking all on the expectation of the imminent return of Christ, Irvingism had sown the seeds of its own decay; its system had not been built to last. The Brethren may have only narrowly avoided a similar fate, since at the outset there were strong tendencies towards extreme literalism, but these were largely overruled by the influence of Newton and Darby. When Irving's doctrinal unorthodoxy became clear, a strong reaction against everything connected with him affected evangelicals generally, and the development of Brethren worship, piety and ecclesiology took its own distinctive course. It will be necessary to return later, when considering the connection of Powerscourt Castle with Brethren origins, to a more detailed study of the links between Irving and the early Brethren. Suffice it to say at this stage, that the temptation to expect the reappearance of miraculous gifts (especially "tongues" and healing, as in Irvingism) was the only example of extreme literalism in the early days of the Brethren, and it rapidly vanished. Literal adoption of practices such as the kiss of peace and foot-washing never appear to have been suggested, probably because the majority of the founders of the Brethren were educated men, unlike the Glasites and the members of the unaffiliated groups. The latent nostalgia among the Brethren for the vigour and purity of New Testament days was largely channelled into the practice of charismatic worship, in particular the emphasis on the principle of liberty of ministry. However prophecy remained a keen interest of the Brethren; many of the founders of the movement participated in the Powerscourt Conferences, to be described later.

The emotionalism of Calvinistic dissent in the 1820s was not always {46} of the frothy type which often appeared in the extremer sects. There was nevertheless an emphasis on the importance of personal experience. This experience sprang from the pages of the Bible, which was the only source of religious knowledge. The accumulated experience and tradition of the church, and any number of formal acts of worship, could not bring a man salvation. A Christian should be certain of his own salvation – a doctrine which called forth the strongest accusations of complacency and of antinomianism from high churchmen. Such a view led naturally to the attempt to actualise the "church of the redeemed" – one in which the circle of fellowship would be drawn just wide enough to include all the "true children of God". This inevitably raised problems in practice. Nearly all evangelicals were agreed on the fundamental minimum of correct belief necessary for a man to gain entry to heaven. Nevertheless, although profession of such a minimum was generally sufficient for admission to occasional communion as a visitor, almost all churches added further doctrinal requirements before admission to regular communion fellowship and to church membership. This was natural in view of the desire to ensure reasonable uniformity of teaching and practice throughout a fellowship of churches. Thus the Particular Baptists required of their members more or less explicit profession of belief in the doctrines of election, and Independents the acceptance of Congregational church polity. This apparent inconsistency between theory and practice was possible because of the distinction made between membership of the church of Christ, and membership of a local church or of a denomination; the former did not confer the latter. In other words, a believer having been incorporated {47} into the invisible, universal body of Christ by an act of faith, had still to join a particular visible local or national body of Christians, and there would normally be more qualifications needed for the latter than for the former. The requirement of "special membership" of a local church was the crisis point for most of the original Dublin Brethren (though not for Darby); though their actions were dictated at first far

74. Religious Census Report, 1853.

more by common sentiment than by logical theory, they made a determined effort to equalise theory and practice by absolutely abolishing the distinction. This was the kernel of the Brethren's claim to be a protest against all sectarianism. Among the Brethren there could be no requirement for fellowship in the local church other than a man's membership of the church of Christ, and there was no such thing, at least in theory, as membership of a particular local church. The systematic development of these ideas took a number of years to mature, and it could be argued that the principle itself was severely compromised, at least among the Exclusives, by the "Bethesda discipline" of 1848. Nevertheless it is clear enough that this is what the most liberal founders of the Brethren movement were aiming at, even if the sequel did not justify their optimism. The churches of the "New York Correspondence" represent a first attempt at the execution of the same ideal, but the Brethren possessed a great advantage by having a coherence and power of propagation which scattered independent groups could never achieve, and also in the fact that the experiment was now in the hands of men of considerable intellectual stature and social standing.

This survey of the background of the Plymouth Brethren movement, the evangelicalism of the 1820s, must be closed with a question. The records {48} of the various Calvinistic secessions at Oxford around 1831 have shown that the Brethren meeting at Plymouth, commenced in January 1832, was only one of a number of contemporaneous radical ecclesiastical experiments, most of them with very similar ideals. The question has therefore to be asked: to what extent was the subsequent success of the Plymouth Brethren movement as an ecclesiastical entity due to any real originality of vision on the part of its founders, and to what extent was it due to fortuitous circumstances? Even if this question cannot be conclusively answered, it is clear enough that at least in its early years, before controversy had tarnished its image, the movement's claim to embody a wider Christian unity than was available elsewhere seemed a valid one to many people. The resulting fellowship was sufficiently different from anything currently in existence to prove positively attractive to large numbers of evangelical Christians in the 1830s and 1840s who for various reasons were dissatisfied with their own denominations.

Chapter II.

The specific origins of the Plymouth Brethren movement.

(a) *Dublin.*

Anthony Norris Groves was born at Newton, Hampshire, on 1st February 1795. He studied dentistry under an uncle in London, and was able to commence his own practice at Plymouth on his nineteenth birthday. In 1816 he married his first cousin Mary, shortly afterwards moving to Exeter, where he became a convinced evangelical under the influence of Miss Bessy Paget, one of two sisters who were afterwards well-known among the Brethren. In 1825 Groves published a lengthy tract entitled “Christian Devotedness, or The Consideration of Our Saviour’s Precept, ‘Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth’.” In this tract Groves argued that all possessions should be used directly in the service of God; his own manner of executing this ideal was to live on a minimum, save nothing, and give away the balance of his income of around £1500 a year. For some years his wife opposed his desire to engage in overseas missionary work, but partly as a result of a visit by Rev. Edward Bickersteth of the Church Missionary Society in July 1825, her opposition was overcome, and with ordination in view, Groves matriculated at Trinity College Dublin on 16th October 1826.⁷⁵ It was necessary to make only quarterly visits to the College in order to take the examinations, and when in Dublin Groves soon made the acquaintance of a wealthy evangelical six months his junior, John Gifford Bellett. The Bellett family had strong ties with the established church, and John’s {50} two brothers both took Orders. John was educated at Exeter Grammar School and at Trinity College Dublin, where he coincided with John Nelson Darby. Bellett and Darby both studied Classics from 1815 to 1819, gaining high honours, and both then studied Law, Darby in Dublin and Bellett in London. Bellett returned to Dublin in 1822 when Darby was already practising as a lawyer there, but although his name appeared in the official lists of barristers, he probably practised little, being under no financial necessity to do so. Groves and Bellett spent a good deal of time together during Groves’ visits to Dublin, and Bellett states in his Recollections that it was Groves who suggested to him some of the views which were later given ecclesiastical expression in the Plymouth Brethren movement.

During a visit at Easter 1827 on which Miss Bessy Paget accompanied him, Groves suggested to Bellett that Christians should be free to “break bread together” – i. e. to hold a Communion service – without the presence of an ordained minister, and that this should take place weekly. Groves’ second wife, editing his memoirs after his death in 1853, states on the authority of Miss Paget that this suggestion was immediately acted upon by Groves and Bellett. However, for a number of reasons this seems most unlikely: the Memoir implies that Miss Paget was not present either when the suggestion was made or when it was put into practice. Groves did not marry his second wife until 1835, and the Memoir, compiled after his death, contains many obscurities in chronology and dating. Bellett and Groves were still members of the established church, and Groves was training for its min-

75. {237} Alumni T. C. D.; W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 5 is incorrect.

The whole of this section relies heavily on “Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves”, by his widow, London 1856; 2nd edn. 1857.

istry. On his return to England from this visit, Miss Paget asked him to preach on Sundays to a small dissenting congregation at Poltimore, four {51} miles north-east of Exeter, and he only reluctantly acceded to her request: "I cannot, perhaps, convey to you the repugnance that I had; first, because I really disapproved on principle; and secondly, because I saw that it would stand in the way of my procuring ordination ... Yet I only allowed this going to Poltimore as a particular exception, in consequence of the notorious inadequacy of the clergyman there. I had never yet gone near a dissenting place of worship."⁷⁶ All this makes it most unlikely that he would have taken part in such an ecclesiastically irregular proceeding as an informal Lord's Supper service. Even if he did make the suggestion during this visit to Dublin, theory is one thing and practice a much bolder step. Further confirmation is supplied by the Bellett Recollections, which do not mention the writer breaking bread with Groves, or even the latter's suggestion of it.

Groves now became doubtful of the value of a University education for an intending missionary, and his doubts over whether he was wasting his time were dramatically resolved when two nights before his next intended trip to Dublin, in June 1827, his house was burgled and the money he had set aside for the trip was stolen. Groves and his wife treated this as direct guidance from God, particularly as in the drawer which was broken open there were two packets of money, one containing £40 for the Dublin trip and the other £16 for taxes; the former was taken and the other left. Groves thereupon severed his connection with Trinity College. At first he hoped that the Church Missionary Society would still send him out as a lay missionary, but finding that they would not permit him to celebrate the communion service, he resolved to go out independently. The way in which {52} circumstances changed to permit this further confirmed his sense of divine guidance. On hearing of the couple's missionary intentions, his wife's family had tried by various means to dissuade them, including the summary recall of a £1000 mortgage lent to Groves' father. Groves had repaid only £100 when, a few days before his death in March 1827, his wife's father signed a new Will repaying the £100, giving the mortgage to Groves, and dividing his property as previously, so that Groves' wife received a considerable sum. This financial security enabled Groves to go ahead with his independent missionary enterprise. Meanwhile his desire for ordination to the ministry of the established church received its death-blow in the realisation that his pacifist convictions would not have allowed him to assent to Article 37, which states that "it is lawful for Christian men, at the commandment of the Magistrate, to wear weapons, and serve in the wars." These circumstances had much to do with his reaching the conclusion that ordination to preach was no requirement of scripture. To Groves this was "the removal of a mountain", and no longer hesitant, on his last visit to Dublin in autumn 1828 he preached in Poolbeg Street Lutheran Chapel. According to the Bellett Recollections, during this visit Groves remarked that he now believed Christians could come together for worship without the presence of any appointed minister, trusting that God would guide some member of the congregation to speak. Bellett can have known little about the Quakers, among whom this idea was a commonplace, for the remark had a profound effect on him. Thirty years later he claimed that he could remember the exact spot in Lower Pembroke Street where he and Groves had stood, describing it as "the birthplace of my mind ... as a brother" – i. e. as a {53} Plymouth Brother. By this time Groves also held strongly another of the principles which were shortly to be given ecclesiastical expression in the Brethren movement – that of the desire to establish a broad communion fellowship based solely on personal

76. *ibid.* (2nd edn. 1857) p. 40.

faith. In a letter to Caldecott dated 16th December 1828 he states that he no longer communicates solely in the Church of England, but is ready to break bread with all true believers.⁷⁷

From spring 1828 until June 1829, the Groves family lived with the Paget sisters in Exeter, and Groves relinquished his lucrative practice in readiness for his departure for the East. During this period there is no evidence of further direct contact between Groves and the embryonic movement in Dublin. However, while in London looking for a ship to take his party to St. Petersburg, he met by chance at the breakfast table of a friend John Vesey Parnell, later Lord Congleton, another evangelical with Irish connections through an uncle in Dublin. This may have been the means by which Parnell met the Dublin group, though it is possible that he already knew Bellett. Parnell arranged for the mission party to sail in the yacht of a friend, a Mr. Puget. They left Gravesend on June 12th and after staying some days at Copenhagen, arrived at St. Petersburg at the beginning of July, from whence Groves' party travelled overland to Bagdad. Groves thus left England before even the Dublin meeting of the Brethren was under way, but his views were thoroughly those of the early Brethren, and on his three subsequent visits to England he worshipped with them. The interest of his friends at home, especially in Brethren circles, was maintained by the publication of his journals⁷⁸, and in September 1830 a party of Brethren sailed from Dublin with the intention of joining him.

(54) It is not certain which of the groups of friends who later joined together to form the Brethren meeting at Dublin, first commenced the regular practice of breaking bread, though the best claimant is the group connected with Edward Cronin. Cronin, later a prominent figure among the Exclusive Brethren in London, recorded his notes on the origins of the movement in a postscript dated July 1871 to the Bellett Recollections. He gives no dates, but states that he was sent from the south of Ireland to Dublin on account of his health.⁷⁹ His father was a Roman Catholic and he was brought up in that faith, but his mother was a Protestant and he joined the Independents before coming to Dublin.⁸⁰ In Dublin he was at first welcomed to communion as a visitor by the various dissenting churches, but when they learned that he had become resident in Dublin, he was required to accept special church membership with one or other of the congregations. This might be considered a reasonable request, since a local church might expect regular attendance and formal membership in order to ensure proper pastoral care and discipline for all its members; nevertheless, Cronin felt that the principle of the unity of Christian believers was being compromised, and that a particular denominational position should not be required of him before admission to communion. He firmly refused "special membership" and was therefore unable to communicate for several months. During this time his opposition to

77. *ibid.* pp. 47–9.

78. "Journal ... during a journey from London to Bagdad, through Russia ... Georgia and Persia. Also a journal of some months' residence at Bagdad." London 1831.

"Journal of a residence at Bagdad, during the years 1830 and 1831", London 1832.

79. Histories of the Brethren often add that he was a young medical (or dental) student and that he came to Dublin to pursue his studies. There is no record of his enrolment in the Trinity College Medical School, and he did not obtain a medical degree at this time – perhaps the Persian expedition interposed – for after the passing of the Medical Act in August 1858 he was one of those established practitioners who were granted honorary M.D. degrees in order to allow them to be registered. At that time he was living in Brixton and was a prominent Exclusive.

80. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, p. 16.

the whole idea of a one-man ministry was growing, and ultimately he felt he could not even attend the Independent chapels for public worship. "I was left exposed to the charge of irreligion and antinomianism. This affected me to such an extent, that it was a season of deep exercise of heart and separation from many that I loved in the Lord; and to avoid the appearance {55} of evil, I spent many a Lord's Day morning under a tree or haystack during the time of their services." Cronin was publicly denounced from the pulpit of York Street Chapel⁸¹ by its minister, Rev. W. Cooper, presumably because he had previously attended there and because members of the congregation sympathized with him. One of the deacons of this Chapel, Edward Wilson, who was Assistant Secretary to the Hibernian Bible Society in Upper Sackville Street, protested and subsequently seceded, as did Cronin's two cousins, the Misses Drury, and a Mr. Timms, a bookseller of Grafton Street whose name appears on Darby's early tracts, all of whom had also been members at York Street Chapel. Cronin and Wilson began to meet for prayer and to break bread together on Sunday mornings in Wilson's room in Sackville Street, presumably being regular in this practice since neither retained a denominational link. When Wilson left for England Cronin continued the practice in the back parlour of his own house at 13, Lower Pembroke Street, where he was joined by Timms and the Misses Drury.

The dating of this series of events can be only tentative. Cronin's name first appears in the 1828 Dublin Directory, but a time-lag in emendations is indicated by the persistence of his name until 1832 although he had left for Persia in September 1830. Brethren histories⁸² usually give the date of his arrival in Dublin as "about 1826", when he was 25.⁸³ In the Directories Wilson appears as Assistant Secretary to the Hibernian Bible Society until 1830, so he probably left Dublin in 1829.⁸⁴ A Miss Drury first appears in the 1829 Directory. Bellett states in his Recollections that Cronin was breaking bread with some others while Darby was still in Wicklow as a clergyman – that is before November 1827. It is also {56} reasonable to assume that Cronin's Sundays in the open were in summertime. A likely reconstruction seems to be that Cronin arrived in late 1826 or early 1827, seceded in summer 1827, was joined by Wilson in autumn 1827, and transferred his breaking-of-bread service to his own house in summer 1829 when Wilson had left Ireland. Finally in November 1829, the first definite date in the Recollections (due to Bellett) Cronin's group moved its meeting to 9, Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin.

John Vesey Parnell, who succeeded to the title 2nd Baron Congleton in 1842, was born in 1805 in Baker Street, London. He was converted while at Edinburgh University, but he apparently did not train for a profession, since a rich uncle left him property from which the annual income was £1200. In 1827 and 1828 he was frequently in Dublin staying with his uncle Thomas Parnell, a wealthy evangelical, and during these visits he became acquainted with some of the later Brethren.⁸⁵ He died in 1882 and his recollections in old age appeared in a booklet published in 1899.⁸⁶ This states that he had met to break

81. The origin of this congregation was connected with Thomas Kelly; see Joseph Miller, loc. cit. note 64.

82. Beginning with Andrew Miller, "The Brethren, their origin, progress and testimony", 1879. Later histories mostly adopted this date.

83. H. Pickering (ed.), loc. cit. note 80.

84. The Annual Reports of the Hibernian Bible Society are unfortunately available in the B. M. L. only for 1808–1822 incl.

85. H. Groves, "Not of the world. A memoir of Lord Congleton", London. 1884.

86. William Collingwood, "The Brethren. A History", 1899. Collingwood had discussed Brethren origins with Congleton in his old age.

bread with William Stokes, a Scripture Reader named Patterson, and several others, “about 1825”. There is no corroboration of such an early date, and the more authoritative “Memoir” mentions neither visits to Dublin earlier than 1827, nor his specific part in the origin of the practice of breaking bread. All that can definitely be said is that some while before joining the Fitzwilliam Square group, Parnell and others had experimented with informal communion services on Sundays, while retaining in addition their separate denominational allegiances, unlike the members of Cronin’s group. It is however clear that especially in Dublin, where the common enemy of Popery broke down many barriers between {57} evangelicals, a number of educated people were at this time making independent protests against what they felt to be the jealous sectarian isolation of the various Protestant churches. The experimental communion services of Cronin and Parnell, in which members of different denominations could express their fellowship, were one result of these protests, and it was the fusion of two or three such groups which led to the beginnings of the Plymouth Brethren as a distinct movement.

The third element in the fusion was that represented by Groves’ suggestions to Bellett and the latter’s friendship with Darby, though these men had least to do with the actual establishment of the Dublin meeting. The connection with the two other groups arose through another Dublin friend of Bellett’s named Francis Hutchinson, son of the Archdeacon of Killala. The early aristocratic and established church connections of Brethren origins are once more apparent, for Hutchinson’s father succeeded to a baronetcy, though this passed to his grandson since Francis died in 1833 at the early age of 31.⁸⁷ Bellett states that in the summer of 1829 his family was at Kingstown and Hutchinson at Bray; Bellett attended the Scotch church at Kingstown where open communion was practised, and he specifically states that he did not know where Hutchinson worshipped on Sundays at that time, although they met occasionally. It appears from Cronin’s postscript that on his return to Dublin, Hutchinson joined Cronin’s group in Lower Pembroke Street, and shortly afterwards, as the group was becoming numerous, offered the use of his house at 9, Fitzwilliam Square, in a fashionable part of Dublin. Hutchinson invited Bellett to join the group here, and he did so, though by his own admission with some misgiving. {58} Through Bellett, Darby, Parnell and Stokes also visited the Fitzwilliam Square breaking-of-bread. The move to Hutchinson’s house in Fitzwilliam Square was made in November 1829, and the service for breaking-of-bread was held regularly each Sunday morning, though at such a time as would not conflict with church services, since many of those who attended had retained denominational connections elsewhere.⁸⁸ This fact confirms that at the outset the Brethren had no intention of founding a new denomination, but simply wished to express visibly an existing unity. Bellett’s misgiving about joining the meeting for communion at Fitzwilliam Square makes it improbable that he and Darby and others had before this date commenced the regular practice of breaking bread.⁸⁹ It is quite possible however that during Darby’s convalescence in Dublin in the winter of 1827–1828, after a riding accident in Wicklow, he celebrated the communion privately – since as a clergyman he was perfectly entitled to do so – and that Bellett and others joined him; Darby’s scrappy postscript to the Bellett Recollections is anything but clear on this matter.

87. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 57–8.

88. Cf. *Methodist origins in Ireland*, text p. 12.

89. Andrew Miller, *op. cit.* note 82, states that Darby and three others commenced breaking bread in the winter of 1827–8, and implies that this {238} was the real origin of the Dublin meeting. He apparently bases this on verbal statements by Darby; the account should be treated with caution.

It seems certain that the real initiative in forming a regular meeting for communion lay with Cronin and Hutchinson, and the cautious position adopted as late as November 1829 by Darby and Bellett is indicated by Cronin's comment about the start of the Fitzwilliam Square meeting:

“At this time dear J. G. B. and J. N. D. were more or less affected by the general state of things in religion, but were unprepared to come out into entire separation and looked suspiciously on our movements, feeling able to attend and minister in the Church of England as well as to come occasionally to our little assembly.”

{59} The next decisive step was the move to an auction room in Aungier Street in May 1830, a date stated quite distinctly by Bellett. Cronin gives as the reason that “humbler brethren” were beginning to join who felt out of place in fashionable Fitzwilliam Square, and Bellett states that the initiative for the move lay with Parnell, who desired that more of a public witness should be made. It was Parnell who financed the move by hiring the room in Aungier Street. Cronin welcomed the change, but Hutchinson was reluctant, Bellett so averse that he stayed away for some weeks, and Darby was out of Dublin at the time. Bellett's reluctance was clearly because the Brethren were now adopting publicly the status and position of a church, and it was clear that their separate denominational allegiances could not long survive. Cronin, Parnell, Stokes and several ladies, however, formed the committed nucleus of the new congregation. Lady Powerscourt joined later, but almost certainly not until after the “summerhouse communion” of September 1833, which will be described below. There were continual additions of evangelical Christians to the meeting, mostly as Cronin describes them “evangelical malcontents” desiring a wider communion fellowship than that afforded by their own churches. The members of the Aungier Street meeting had “very little intelligence as to the real character of God's movement” among them. In view of the idealistic accounts of the Dublin origins current among Exclusive Brethren at the time when he was writing, this statement is a remarkably frank admission by Cronin that the early Brethren had no clearly-defined aims or programme, but simply felt themselves drawn together by common sentiments. Also, Bellett and Cronin both admit somewhat apologetically that the impulsive free worship {60} later characteristic of all sections of the Plymouth Brethren was for a long time not practised in Dublin. Of the Fitzwilliam Square meeting Bellett says: “(Hutchinson) also prescribed a certain line of things, as the services of prayer, singing and teaching, that should be found amongst us each day”, while of Aungier Street Cronin recalls: “We felt free up to this time and long afterwards to make arrangements among ourselves as to who should distribute the bread and wine, and take other ministries in the Assembly ...” The final postscript to the Bellett Recollections is by James Butler Stoney, who when he wrote in 1871 was also a prominent Exclusive; speaking of the time when he joined Aungier Street in 1834 Stoney says: “At that time Mr. Stokes used to read regularly some portion of scripture every Lord's day”, and of his time at Plymouth in 1838 “it used to be arranged beforehand who should break the bread and do official acts”. In fully-developed Brethrenism any suggestion of prior arrangement or regularity in the worship of the Lord's Supper would have been considered a grievous limitation on the freedom of operation of the Holy Spirit. It is possible that the development of Brethren thinking on this subject was influenced by the accession of several hundred disaffected Quakers to the movement after the Beacon controversy of 1835–1837, which will be described later; also at least one of the Plymouth founders, B. W. Newton, had a Quaker family background.

In the summer of 1830 the follow-up mission party to Bagdad was formed, the financial initiative for this venture also being Parnell's.⁹⁰ The party consisted of Parnell, Cronin with his sister and mother, an Irish Brother named Hamilton, and Francis William Newman who had come over from {61} Oxford to join them. They left Dublin by steamer on 18th September, landed at Bordeaux on the 23rd, and travelled thence overland. The journey to Persia proved extremely difficult and Cronin's sister did not survive it; Hamilton left the party to return to England, and it was not until June 1832 that the others joined the recently-bereaved Groves at Bagdad. While delayed at Aleppo for some months, Cronin and Parnell (though apparently not Newman, who was baptised in 1836 at Bristol) underwent believers' baptism; Groves, who had been baptised some years earlier at Exeter, recorded his pleasure that they had taken this step. Cronin's mother died soon after reaching Bagdad, and the plague combined with the chaotic political situation to make evangelistic work virtually impossible. Newman returned to England in 1833 while the others, accepting at length that the Bagdad Mission could not be a success, moved to India. Cronin and Parnell returned to England in 1837.⁹¹

John Nelson Darby was born in Westminster in November 1800 into a family which like Bellett's was wealthy and had strong connections with the Established Church; Darby also had two brothers in Orders. His five elder brothers, like himself, all attended Westminster School, and four of them then went to Christ Church Oxford. He himself attended Trinity College Dublin from 1815 to 1819, gaining a Classical Gold Medal in the summer of 1819. He was called to the Irish Chancery Bar in 1822, and his subsequent abandonment of an apparently promising legal career greatly disappointed his brother-in-law Edward (later Chief Justice) Pennefather, who had married in 1806 Darby's eldest sister Susan. Darby apparently underwent the religious experiences of a high churchman⁹² but by about 1825 was a strong evangelical like Pennefather. He was ordained deacon by William Bissett, Bishop of Raphoe, in the cathedral church of St. Eunan, Raphoe, Co. Londonderry, on Sunday 7th August {62} 1825.⁹³ William Magee, Archbishop of Dublin, sent him to be the curate of Calary, a remote mountain parish six miles south of Enniskerry in Co. Wicklow. Calary had no church at this time, and services were held in the school-house, which was owned by the Powerscourt family, whose seat was at Enniskerry. Darby thus met the reigning lady of Powerscourt Castle, Theodosia, an eligible young widow of emotional temperament and extreme evangelical religious convictions. Second wife of the 5th Viscount Powerscourt, she had been widowed in 1823 after

90. Bellett Recollections say 1831, but this is incorrect.

91. On the details of the missionary enterprise see Groves' two Journals (note 78), "Memoir of the late A. N. Groves" (note 75), H. Groves op. cit. note 85, and F. W. Newman "Personal narrative in letters, chiefly from Turkey in the years 1830 to 1833" (1856). Newman admits in his preface, dated October 1854, that he has edited his letters to remove traces of his former religious opinions, with which he evidently no longer agrees.

Baptisms: Groves, "Memoir" 1856 edn. p. 27; at Aleppo, *ibid.* p. 194, letter by Groves October 1831; Groves says here "*all ... at Aleppo*", but on F. W. Newman cf. J. H. Philpot (ed.), op. cit. note 20, Vol. I p. 133.

92. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, pp. 13–4 & authorities.

93. Brethren histories unanimously state that Magee ordained Darby deacon, but his original Ordination Certificate is in the Sibthorpe Collection. In 1825 Magee spent some time in London, and his wife died in September after a long illness; this may explain why there were no ordinations at Dublin that year. Magee's previous appointment as Bishop of Raphoe may explain why Darby was sent so far away to be ordained.

only two years of marriage. Darby's immediate superior was Robert Daly, Rector of Powerscourt from 1819 to 1843 and afterwards Bishop of Cashel. Darby worked indefatigably in his parish, riding or tramping for hours among the hills and peat bogs, and living in a peasant's cottage like the poor labourers among whom he ministered. A graphic description of his labours is given by Francis Newman, who relates that the Catholic peasantry looked on him almost as a mediaeval saint:

“The stamp of heaven seemed to them clear in a frame so wasted by austerity, so superior to worldly pomp, and so partaking in all their indigence. That a dozen such men would have done more to convert all Ireland to Protestantism, than the whole apparatus of the church establishment, was ere long my conviction.”⁹⁴

On Sunday 19th February 1826, Magee ordained Darby priest in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin.

Bellett often visited his friend in his mountain parish, and Darby when in Dublin stayed usually with Pennefather, where he met and was the instrument of conversion of J. C. Philpot. In November 1827 Darby had a {63} riding accident in Wicklow and convalesced at his brother-in-law's home, where he met Francis Newman. Newman had postponed taking up his Fellowship at Balliol College Oxford on conscientious grounds and had replaced Philpot as private tutor in the Pennefather household in spring 1827. He was five years Darby's junior, and the latter's immense influence on him is recalled in his autobiography. In his religious views Newman had reacted against the incipient high church movement at Oxford and was ascribing increasing authority to the Bible alone. In striving for a more primitive form of Christianity, he states that the second period of his creed “is characterised, partly by the great ascendancy exercised over me by one powerful mind and still more powerful will, partly by the vehement effort which throughout its duration urged me to long after the establishment of Christian Fellowship in a purely Biblical Church as the first great want of Christendom.”⁹⁵ This aspiration he shared with many of the early Brethren, and Newman's spiritual longings display the nostalgia and idealism which seem to have affected many evangelicals at this time. Newman returned to Oxford in 1828 with a great admiration and respect for Darby, which was later instrumental in causing his brief association with the Brethren movement and his joining the follow-up mission party to Bagdad. Meanwhile it seems that Darby did not return to Calary for any length of time after his recovery, though Daly must have kept his curacy open for him, since ten of Darby's ex-parishioners wrote to him from Calary school-house on 28th March 1829 appealing to him to return to his post.⁹⁶ This provides another indication that Darby's attachment to the established church was dying only very slowly, and confirms that his was not the formative {64} influence behind the Dublin origins of the Brethren.

Nevertheless in 1827 this attachment received a severe blow. Magee's Metropolitan Charge on his triennial visitation to the clergy of his diocese, preached in St. Patrick's Cathedral on 10th October 1826, was published in early 1827, and as a result many of his clergy signed a petition to the House of Commons claiming on avowedly Erastian grounds protection by the civil authorities against Roman Catholic opposition in the execution of their duties. The last straw for Darby, however, was the Archbishop's requirement, in a

94. F. W. Newman, “Phases of Faith”, 1850, pp. 27–8. Darby is referred to throughout this book as “The Irish Clergyman”.

95. *ibid.* p. 26.

96. The extremely unctious (= unctuous) original is in the Sibthorpe Collection.

Pastoral Letter of late 1827, that all converts from Roman Catholicism within his diocese should take the oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance to the British Crown. Darby had already composed a reply to Magee's Charge, and the Pastoral Letter precipitated his action in having it printed and sent, as an anonymous protest, to all the clergy of the diocese. Magee's Charge sets forth to show that the Church and the State are "but two different aspects of the same Christian community" and that therefore "the ministers must be looked on as instruments of the State." Darby attacks especially the Archbishop's remark against Roman Catholicism that "the Sovereign cannot prescribe in favour of a system that maintains a spiritual supremacy independent of civil government." On the contrary, wrote Darby, there is such a supremacy, the spiritual supremacy of Christ in His Church. In a postscript Darby describes the imposition of the oaths as "closing the door of Christ against weak souls" – i. e. laying an extra and entirely unscriptural burden on the new converts. In view of the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads in the imminence of Roman Catholic Emancipation, the attitude of the Archbishop and clergy is an {65} understandable one; but equally understandable is the protest of an evangelical who felt that the claims of Christ and Caesar were being fatally confused. Darby saw the possibility of converting the Irish peasants vanishing if they were required as a condition of conversion to swear their political loyalty to a distant and often hated authority.⁹⁷

In 1828 Darby published a further tract entitled "Considerations on the nature and unity of the Church of Christ". This has been called "the first Brethren tract" but the description is misleading, for it is the writing of a man who does not yet see his way clearly, and it proposes no campaign or organisation. Behind its argument is the feeling characteristic of much evangelical discontent in the 1820s, that the visible lines of demarcation in most denominations do not coincide with the real distinction between vital and nominal Christianity. Darby laments that "the true church of God has no avowed communion at all". There are individual believers in the various denominations; the Bible Societies and joint missionary endeavours have given some outlet for the desire of Christians to be united in fellowship, but much more is needed. The furthest Darby goes is in the following statement, where "the world" seems to include the institutionalised churches: "I do believe there will be a gradual development of the people of God, by a separation from the world ... but it is not my purpose to follow presumptuously my own thoughts about this." Whoever seeks the interests of any particular denomination is an enemy of the work of the Spirit of God. Christ's death is the centre of Christian communion, and the communion service is therefore both the symbol and the instrument of unity. The centrality of the communion service in Darby's {66} devotional Christianity, particularly as the symbol of Christian fellowship and unity, remained fundamental to his whole subsequent ecclesiastical course, and in this matter he remained closest to his original high-church views. Notably absent from his early tracts are the doctrinal considerations regarding baptism and church order which so greatly characterised the secessions of the Oxford clergy in the 1830s. Unlike the Oxford seceders, Darby never publicly renounced the Church of England, and never preached or published specifically his reasons for retiring from the ministry.⁹⁸ Indeed for several more years he preached and officiated in churches

97. Magee's Charge in the Nat. Lib. Dublin, P. 315 (1). Darby's reply, anon. & unpubl. was "Considerations addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin and the clergy who signed the petition to the House of Commons for protection"; reprinted in Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Eccl. Vol. I, pp. 1–29.

98. His nearest approach was a tract written in 1836 entitled "The connexion of the term clergy with the penal guilt of the present dispensation, & the sin against the Holy Ghost." Darby was apparently persuaded not to circulate this at the time, and it eventually appeared about 1873 with an explanatory

of the Establishment at the request of friends; Newton first invited him to Plymouth to speak in the churches, and in April 1832 the Plymouth papers referred to him still as Rev. Mr. Darby. Bellett describes him as late as 1834 as only “all but detached from the Church of England”.⁹⁹ That his attitude was somewhat indecisive for a considerable time is implied also by his apparent lack of positive participation in the founding of the public meetings at Dublin and Plymouth. After leaving Calary Darby engaged in itinerant preaching in Ireland; in January and February 1829 he was around Ennis in Co. Clare, where his Bible preaching aroused opposition even to the extent of a threat on his life.¹⁰⁰ When the regular breaking-of-bread was commenced at Fitzwilliam Square, Darby was in Dublin, but he then went away on a preaching tour around Limerick, where he was helped by a local evangelical named Thomas Maunsell, later a leading Plymouth Brother at Hereford. While Darby was in Limerick, the Dublin meeting was transferred to the public room in Aungier Street.

{67}

(b) *Oxford and Plymouth*

Francis Newman states that when he had returned to Oxford from Ireland, he at length induced Darby to visit the University, which Darby did in June 1830 on his way from Dublin to his family’s London home.¹⁰¹ Darby stayed some days at Oxford and Newman introduced him to many of his friends, to whom Darby instantly assumed the place of universal father-confessor, as if he had been a known and long-trusted friend: “His insight into character, and tenderness pervading his austerity, so opened young men’s hearts, that

preface and the revised title “The notion of a clergyman dispensationally the sin against the Holy Ghost”: reprinted in Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Eccl. Vol. I, pp. 54–77. See text p. 119.

99. {239} Darby in the fourth of the “Seven Letters”, April 1845. See text p. 174; Plymouth & Devonport Weekly Journal, 5/4/32; Bellett Recollections.

100. A threatening letter from Captain Rock of Corofin near Ennis, preserved in an album in the Sibthorpe Collection, reads (sic):

“Dear Sir, I hope you will take notice for your own sake not to be Disturbing the people of Corofin – By your swadling (***) business coming like a Theif at night seducing the people of Corofin by your Bible business and if you dont mind what I say you will meet with your fate at last In Corofin so darby return to your own Native place we have heard who you are and what your sceaming (?) way of living is so you Rascal we have listened a long time to you But no longer make off as soon as posible ...”

(** A term in use for some years to describe Methodist preachers. For the origin of the term, see C. H. Crookshank, op. cit. note 17, Vol. I p. 13 & cf. p. 18).

101. F. W. Newman, op. cit. note 94, p. 44.

In his note appended to the Bellett Recollections, Darby states that the visit was “after July 1830”; but he met Newton during it. Newton’s periods of residence in Oxford can be ascertained from his Wine Account in the Exeter College Buttery Books, which are still in existence, and these show that he left Oxford on 1st July 1830 for the summer vacation. Yet Newton had met Darby by July 31st; see text p. 69–70 & note 112.

See also Newton Memoirs, pp. 61, 234–5, 239.

If Darby was Newman’s guest at Oxford, the date of his visit may be suggested by the fact that Newman’s Battells (wine & food charges) were about double the average for the week 28th May to 3rd June 1830; Newman incurred a particularly high Buttery charge on Sat. 29th May, which could have been in connection with his holding a party to introduce various friends of his to Darby; but this is conjecture. (Newman’s accounts & periods of residence from records at Balliol College.)

day after day there was no end of secret closetings with him.”¹⁰² At Oxford Darby met George Vicesimus Wigram, an undergraduate of Queen’s, who was the twentieth child of Sir Robert Wigram. George had been converted while serving as an officer in the army, and had entered Queen’s in 1826 at the age of 21, with the intention of taking Orders. His family was very wealthy, and in later life among the Brethren Wigram was able to devote his whole time to religious pursuits.¹⁰³ Darby also met Lancelot Brenton and William Gladstone, who was at that time a disciple of Bulteel. His most significant meeting, however, was with Benjamin Wills Newton, a Lay Fellow of Exeter College and close friend of Newman’s. All these men were five to seven years his juniors, and it appears that Darby was able to establish over them, temporarily even in the case of brilliant men like Newman, an immense psychological ascendancy. Wigram in particular proved his staunchest ally throughout the stormy vicissitudes of his subsequent ecclesiastical career. Newman has left a most significant appraisal of Darby’s power of spiritual dominance:

“In spite of the strong revulsion which I felt against {68} some of the peculiarities of this remarkable man, I for the first time in my life found myself under the dominion of a superior ... Henceforth I began to ask: what will *he* say to this and that? In *his* reply I always expected to find a higher portion of God’s Spirit, than in any I could frame for myself. In order to learn divine truth, it became to me a surer process to consult him, than to search for myself and wait upon God ... Such was Ignatius Loyola in his day.”¹⁰⁴

Benjamin Wills Newton was born at Devonport to a Quaker family on 12th December 1807, matriculated at Oxford on 11th December 1824, and was a Lay Fellow of Exeter College from 1st July 1826 until he vacated his Fellowship when he married on 15th March 1832.¹⁰⁵ In January 1827 he experienced evangelical conversion and was for some time an ardent disciple of Bulteel. In a letter to his mother dated 30th December 1827, Newton describes his conversion earlier in the year, urges her to abandon Quakerism because it does not ascribe sufficient importance to the objective revelation of scripture, and refers to his hero as “my darling Bulteel”.¹⁰⁶ When Bulteel gave the University Sermon on 6th February 1831, the preacher’s procession left from Newton’s rooms, since Bulteel no longer had rooms in College.¹⁰⁷ Francis Newman had been Newton’s private tutor for a while before he went to Ireland, and after Newman’s return to Oxford in summer 1828 the two renewed their friendship. One evening during Darby’s visit to Oxford, he was the guest at dinner of Dr. Hill, the evangelical Vice-Principal of St. Edmund’s Hall

102. F. W. Newman, *op. cit.* note 94, p. 45.

103. For example he financed and prepared Concordances to the Hebrew O. T. & Greek N. T.; H. Pickering (ed.) *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 41–3.

104. F. W. Newman, *op. cit.* note 94, pp. 33–4.

105. {240} For Newton’s early life and religious development, see an unpublished Ph. D thesis, London 1965, “The origins of the Plymouth Brethren”, by H. H. Rowdon, pp. 114–124. This only slightly overlaps the present work.

106. Original letter in the Fry Collection.

107. Newton Memoirs pp. 95–139 relate mainly to his connection with Bulteel. Bulteel had lost his rooms because his Exeter College Fellowship had lapsed when he married on 6th October 1829. T. Mozley (*op. cit.* note 33) Vol. I p. 228 records an amusing anecdote about Bulteel’s marriage, to the daughter of a High Street pastrycook; Froude commented “poor Bulteel!” – but the girl turned out to possess quite a fortune.

from 1812 to 1851. Newman persuaded Newton to join them, overruling his reluctance. After the meal Dr. Hill asked Darby to speak, and his exposition of a Psalm so impressed Newton that he invited {69} Darby to his own rooms the following evening to discuss theological questions. The following morning Darby left Oxford for London.¹⁰⁸ During this visit to England he also went to Cambridge, but appears to have made little impact there, possibly because the stabilising influence of Simeon was still paramount.¹⁰⁹ Only one prominent Brother of later years had been a “Sim” – Captain W. G. Rhind, who was at Sidney Sussex from 1820 to 1823. It is notable that Rhind, who was a little older than most of the founders of the Brethren, maintained his connection with the Church of England until 1838, some years after he first came into contact with the Brethren through John Synge and the Powerscourt circle, and also that he was a distinctly moderate adherent of the movement.¹¹⁰ The contrast between the stability of Cambridge evangelicalism at this time, and the upheavals at Oxford, is most striking, and was clearly due to the presence there of Simeon, who did not die until 1836.

Newton left Oxford on 1st July 1830 for his mother’s home at Plymouth to spend the summer vacation there. Just before he left, news about the “Spirit gifts” of healing and “tongues” at Row reached Francis Newman by letter, and he was greatly excited about it. At the end of term Wigram, accompanied by his mother, went to Scotland for a holiday and visited Row to investigate; Newton wrote a letter to them from Plymouth on 31st July to which a postscript asked for Darby’s address, as there was a useful sphere of service for him at Plymouth. Newton must have obtained the required address elsewhere, possibly from Newman who was still in residence at Balliol until August 25th preparing for his trip to Persia¹¹¹, for the letter to the Wigrams, sent “to be called for” at Glasgow, was returned {70} to Newton undelivered.¹¹² Newton, and possibly also Newman, wrote to Darby in August, and at their request he visited Row.¹¹³ His report by letter to Newman indicated that the Latin endings to the unknown words showed poverty of invention rather than spiritual agency, and the further fact that no interpretation was given convinced Newman that the manifestations were spurious. Darby had already reached a similar conclusion, and Newton needed little convincing.¹¹⁴ Darby then returned to Ireland.

108. Newton Memoirs, p. 61 & p. 235.

109. The authority for Darby’s 1830 Cambridge visit is his own recollection in a letter of 1857 to Prof. Tholuck, the famous Protestant theologian at Halle whom Darby knew. This appears in some later editions of Letters of J. N. D. and in H. A. Ironside, “A historical sketch of the Brethren movement”, Grand Rapids Michigan 1942, Appendix A, pp. 181–7.

110. J. B. I(sbell?), “Faithful Unto Death. A memoir of W. G. Rhind R.N.” London 1863; H. Pickering (ed.), op. cit. note 21, pp. 23–6.

Rhind lived from 1794 to 1863; he retired from active service on half-pay in 1817, was converted at Plymouth in 1819, and at Cambridge showed great interest in the conversion of the Jews: Simeon called him “the Jew boy”. J. B. I. says he went to Cambridge in 1822, but Alumn. Cant. 1820.

111. Balliol records show that poor Newman was completely alone in College for the last few weeks, apart from College servants. His family, especially his elder brother, had cut off all intercourse with him because of his evangelical convictions.

112. Original in the Fry Collection.

113. On Newton’s asking Darby to go to Row, see Newton Memoirs pp. 208 & 234–5. Darby states that he went to Row “rather as deputed for others than for myself”: “The irrationalism of infidelity” (his reply to F. W. Newman’s “Phases of Faith”), in Coll. Writ. of J. N. D., Apol. Vol. I p. 449. H. H. Rowdon, op. cit. note 105, disputes this visit, but Darby’s own statement seems conclusive.

114. F. W. Newman, op. cit. note 94, p. 178; Newton Memoirs pp. 208, 234, 235.

Wigram also went to Dublin after his visit to Scotland, attended the Aungier Street meeting and met some of the Powerscourt circle. His intention of joining the follow-up mission party to Bagdad was blocked at the last moment, possibly because of his engagement to an Irish girl.¹¹⁵ He then returned to Oxford where he sought a curacy, but as Bishop Blomfield of London refused to ordain him because of his low-church views, and as in any case his attachment to the established church was rapidly weakening, he relinquished thoughts of ordination and settled at Plymouth in spring 1831 with the intention of devoting himself to religious and philanthropic activity. Meanwhile Newton had invited Darby to Plymouth, suggesting that there would be many opportunities for him to speak in the churches.¹¹⁶ Darby arrived from Ireland in early December 1830, possibly by the 12th which was Newton's first Sunday back from Oxford, and stayed with Newton all that vacation. The "wandering churchmanship" of the two friends called forth adverse comment from Newton's mother.¹¹⁷ Local newspaper reports of religious meetings indicate Darby's presence in Plymouth at this time, the most interesting being a report of the first Devonshire meeting of the "S. P. C. K. on the Continent" on Friday 31st December 1830. The four main [71] speakers were Mr. Newton, Rev. J. Darby who spoke "at considerable length", Rev. Mr. Harris of Plymstock, and Captain Hall R. N. who spoke of the urgency of the situation in view of the imminence of the Second Coming of Christ.¹¹⁸ In the friendship of these four persons the germ of the Brethren meeting at Plymouth was born, though the practical and financial initiative came some months later after the arrival of Wigram. Darby accompanied Newton back to Oxford at the start of Hilary Term 1831, and both attended Bulteel's famous sermon. It is not clear whether Darby returned to Ireland in spring 1831, but Newton was not again at Plymouth until the beginning of July.¹¹⁹ A reconstruction of the movements of Darby and Newton is essential for the study of the Plymouth origins, since both were present when the meeting began there.

Comment was occasioned in the Plymouth newspapers in April 1831 by the activities of some naval Christians in preaching in the market-place, and an editorial in August named Captain Hall and disapproved of his conduct.¹²⁰ On 26th September 1831 Newton was conspicuous by his absence from the twelfth annual meeting in Plymouth of the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, for he was the Society's Secretary at Oxford.¹²¹ This confirms that he had gone to Ireland for the first Powerscourt Conference on prophecy, which was held from Tuesday to Friday 4th to 7th October. He returned direct to Oxford, arriving by 11th October.

115. [241] Newton Memoirs pp. 252 & 300.

116. So stated Darby in the fourth of the "Seven Letters": text p. 174.

117. Newton Memoirs p. 254. It is possible that her comment referred to Darby's second visit to Plymouth, in winter 1831–2, before the meeting was established at Providence Chapel.

118. Plymouth & Devonport Weekly Journal, 6/1/31.

119. Newton Memoirs p. 239 state that Darby was present at Bulteel's sermon. Darby may have stayed then in Oxford, for he participated in the tract war which ensued: see text p. 16. From the Exeter BATTERY Books it seems that between 26/1/31 and 29/6/31, Newton was away from College only from 3rd to 6th and from 11th to 24th June; it is therefore almost certain that he did not return to Plymouth until early July.

120. Plymouth & Devonport Weekly Journal, 14/4/31 and 4/8/31.

121. *ibid.* 29/9/31; Newton Memoirs p. 208; Annual Reports of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (1830–1 is missing from the bound volumes in the B. M. L.)

At the end of January 1831 the foundation-stone of a new Chapel to house the increasing congregation of a Rev. Mr. Cawcott of Richmond Street Chapel, was laid in Raleigh Street, Plymouth. The Chapel was to hold four hundred and would be named "Providence Chapel".¹²² Presumably during {72} 1831 Mr. Cawcott died, or for some other reason his congregation no longer required the Chapel, for when it was completed it was sold on 2nd December to George Wigram for £750, the three trustees being himself, Newton, and H. M. Gibson of Plymouth.¹²³ The Newton Memoirs state that Wigram's interest in prophecy had been lately awakened by intercourse with the Powerscourt circle while in Ireland, and that he desired to purchase the Chapel solely in order to give lectures on prophecy.¹²⁴ The application for registration of the Chapel was made on 10th December in the names of Wigram, their family servant Snook, and a builder named Arthur Backalake; it was licensed for worship on Monday 12th December.¹²⁵ Newton was in Plymouth from the second week in November, and relates that for the first three weeks the Chapel was used only on Monday evenings for the lectures, to which numbers of the local evangelical clergymen came. The earliest date, therefore, on which the Brethren could have used the Raleigh Street Chapel for public Sunday worship was 18th December 1831; but as it seems unlikely that the prophetic lectures commenced before the sale had been completed, that is before Monday 5th December, and it would have been recalled later if the first Sunday service had been on Christmas Day, the opening of public worship may be safely assigned to January 1832. The local papers confirm the presence in Plymouth of Darby, Newton, Hall and Harris on 27th January, when they all attended a meeting of the Bible Society in the Mechanics' Institute. Darby was still in Plymouth on 30th March, when he spoke at a meeting concerning education in Ireland.¹²⁶ By 13th April he was in Dublin, from where he wrote a letter; in May he addressed another letter from Dublin to the whole church at Plymouth.¹²⁷ From both of these letters {73} it is clear that the Plymouth meeting is under way. Shortly afterwards he returned once more from Ireland to Plymouth for a brief visit.

The only extant description of the first Sunday services at Providence Chapel comes from the Newton Memoirs, which were written in Newton's old age and abound with vagueness and inaccuracies. Darby had returned from Ireland, where he also had attended the first Powerscourt Conference, at the end of 1831, and was staying with Newton. Both of them attended on the first Sunday, when at Wigram's suggestion the Lord's Supper was celebrated privately after the service in the vestry adjoining the Chapel; Newton, Darby, Wigram, Hall and some ladies took part. On the next Sunday the table was spread in readiness for the Communion service in the body of the Chapel. This was presumably

122. Plymouth & Devonport Weekly Journal, 20/1/31 and 3/2/31.

123. Title Deeds of Raleigh Street Chapel, now in the possession of the Town Clerk's Department at Plymouth.

124. Newton Memoirs pp. 252, 254, 259, 300.

125. Vol. 91 of the Episcopal Records of the Bishops of Exeter, now in the possession of the Devon County Archivist. Snook is mentioned in Wigram's postscript to the Bellett Recollections; this states that from "1829 or 1830" (autumn 1830 seems more likely) Wigram and his wife adopted the habit of breaking bread together every Sunday wherever they were, even if there was only Snook to join them.

126. Plymouth & Devonport Weekly Journal, 2/2/32 and 5/4/32; Devonport Telegraph & Plymouth Chronicle, Saturday 31/3/32.

127. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III p. 490 (letter from Dublin 13/4/32); Vol. I pp. 1-5 (letter from Dublin to the Plymouth church in May 1832).

done at Wigram's instigation, and Newton recalled that both he and Darby were surprised and perturbed by this unexpected move. As with Bellett at Dublin in 1830, they probably felt that it was taking publicly the status of a church. Newton states that it was very wrong for him to take part, since he had not yet made up his mind to leave the Church of England, and he was a member of an Anglican University. Whatever misgivings Newton and Darby had, Wigram's initiative precipitated the formation of a distinct congregation at Plymouth. From this time the services of worship and communion were continued regularly at Providence Chapel, though doctrinal strife was by no means absent. On the very Sunday of the first public communion service, Captain Hall expounded the doctrine of the any-moment return of Christ and the rapture of the saints in the morning, and Wigram denounced it in the evening. Newton was called in to help settle the dispute, and he agreed with Wigram. However, Hall's insistence on this {74} doctrine resulted in a test being set for preachers so that only exponents of the doctrine would speak in the Chapel. This restriction was presumably only temporary, for Newton, who shortly became the dominant figure in the meeting, never accepted the doctrine.¹²⁸

In spite of their doctrinal differences it appears that Wigram and Hall provided the driving force behind the development of the Plymouth meeting. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the two collaborated in other socio-religious activities, notably in the establishment at the end of February 1832 of a "Temperance Clubroom" in Southside Street, where tea, cocoa, rolls and butter were provided at cost price for the poor and free for the penniless, each morning and evening from 7 to 9.¹²⁹ Newton and Darby seem to have been more cautious, but for Darby at least the starting of the Plymouth meeting was a milestone. In April 1832 he wrote:

"Plymouth, I assure you, has altered the face of Christianity to me, from finding brethren, and they acting together. There are, as you know, individuals here, but scattered as missionaries over the country."¹³⁰

This was written from Dublin, and appears to stress as the distinctive novelty of Plymouth the corporate standing and action of the church there; though it is not clear why Aungier Street had not made a similar impression on him. However, from this moment the pace

128. On the first services at Providence Chapel, see Newton Memoirs pp. 238, 252, 254, 256, 259, 261 & 300. The doctrinal differences over prophecy Newton recalled thus: "There was Wigram on the other hand; he had come with very sedate views, very clear and sound ... Darby would take {242} neither side at that time. The Chapel belonged to Wigram and a quarrel ensued. I tried to intervene. Hall had all the leaders with him, and Wigram was so upset that he went away, ultimately settled in London ... You've no idea how much feeling it awakened ..." (p. 238) See also p. 254. There is only one other independent reminiscence of Plymouth origins, by W. H. Cole, a member of the Brethren from 1843 until his death about 1902; quoted in G. H. Lang, "Antony Norris Groves", London 1939, appendix pp. 410-7. Cole states that the meeting began in a house in King Street, where Newton used to preach. From Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 10 (letter October 1832 to Plymouth, probably to Wigram) it seems that this may have been a small meeting under the spiritual supervision of brethren from Providence Chapel, probably for bible reading rather than breaking bread; and there is no evidence to suggest that it antedates the origins at Raleigh Street. (Darby calls it "the poor souls in K. Street".) King Street is quite close to Raleigh Street; Newton lived in Gascoigne Street which was often spelt Gasking Street, but the two were distinct. It has not been possible to trace which, if any, of the early members at Plymouth possessed a house in King Street itself.

129. Devonport Telegraph & Plymouth Chronicle, Saturday 10/3/32.

130. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III p. 490 (letter from Dublin 13/4/32).

distinctly quickened towards the growth of the Brethren as a distinct ecclesiastical unit, of which Darby himself was rapidly to become the foremost architect.

Darby's letter to someone at Plymouth dated 15th October 1832 indicates that after a brief visit there earlier in the summer he had {75} returned to Ireland by way of Bristol, where in July he had preached for Müller and Craik at both Gideon and Bethesda Chapels; here he wished for "a little more principle of largeness of communion".¹³¹ Darby's departure from Plymouth may have been hastened by the cholera epidemic which broke out in the city in July and spread thence during the summer. He attended the second Powerscourt Conference from Monday to Friday, 24th to 28th September, and then embarked on a preaching tour in Counties Westmeath, Armagh and Fermanagh. After this he may have visited Limerick, for a letter of November 1832 states that a small church has been formed there.¹³² His hesitancy having vanished, Darby expended all his efforts in building up the infant meetings and founding new ones.

The Plymouth meeting grew rapidly in size, partly by the accession of existing Christians – the evangelical background being strong at Plymouth through the forty-three years' ministry there until 1827 of one of the few high Calvinist clergymen of the established church, Rev. Robert Hawker – and partly by conversions, for gospel preaching services were held at the Raleigh Street Chapel and open-air work was done in neighbouring villages, especially by Hall. The meeting obtained a notable accession in September 1832 in the person of J. L. Harris, whose farewell sermon giving his reasons for seceding was preached at Plymstock on Sunday 2nd September and the substance of it afterwards published as "An Address to the parishioners of Plymstock". Harris' reasons were "objections to the Baptismal and Funeral services, as applied to all persons indiscriminately, whether children of good or bad parents, or persons of infamous or righteous character."¹³³ Similar motives prompted the secession to the Brethren in 1833 of Henry {76} Borlase. Borlase was born at Helston in 1806, attended Trinity College Cambridge from 1823 to 1828, and was appointed Rector of St. Keyne in Cornwall in August 1830. He edited the first two issues of the quarterly Brethren publication "The Christian Witness" in January and April 1834. Harris took over from him as Editor when Borlase became ill in summer 1834, and after he died in November 1835 his reasons for seceding were published in a tract of 1836 edited by three friends of his at Plymouth, one of whom was Newton. His main reason for seceding was the unscriptural state of the Church of England, shown in particular by the indiscriminate use of the Burial Service with its promise of the hope of resurrection, the use of the word "regenerate" in the Baptismal Service – both of which practices assume, often unwarrantedly, the earnest faith of the participants and the power of godly discipline in the church – and the wholesale admission to

131. Letter dated 15/10/32 in *Letters of J. N. D.* Vol. I pp. 5–11.

132. *ibid.* pp. 17–9. The editor has tentatively dated this 1833. It seems to have been written to Plymouth just after a Powerscourt Conference, 1832 or 1833, since the Plymouth meeting for communion is referred to, and it says that a small church has been founded at Limerick. Yet in a letter received at Plymouth on 30/4/33 Darby states that the Limerick church is rapidly growing (*ibid.* pp. 21–2). This fixes the Conference as the 1832 one and the letter c. November 1832.

133. *Devonport Telegraph & Plymouth Chronicle*, Saturday 15/9/32.

See also J. L. Harris, "What is a church? or Reasons for withdrawing from the Ministry of the Establishment", Plymouth & London, 1832.

communion which allows the careless and ungodly to participate.¹³⁴ Yet another West Country clergyman who joined the Brethren in 1833, probably influenced by Harris, was Richard Hill. He was another native of Helston, born there in December 1799; he attended Exeter College Oxford from 1818 to 1821, was ordained in 1824, and from October 1829 until the time of his secession was curate of West Alvington near Plymstock.¹³⁵ All the founders and prominent early members at Plymouth, except for Newton, remained within some section of the Brethren throughout their lives: Darby and Wigram among the Exclusives, Hall Harris and Hill with Open Brethren.

After his final departure from Oxford Newton lived with his wife and mother in Gascoigne Street, Plymouth, supporting himself by taking pupils¹³⁶ and by acting as an examiner for the Devonport Classical and {77} Mathematical School.¹³⁷ He rapidly became the leading figure in the Plymouth meeting, especially after the departure of Wigram in 1833 and Hall in 1837, and was recognised as “elder” by Darby, who addressed a letter to him as such from Dublin in the early years.¹³⁸ Newton’s influence on a man named Douglas, also late of Exeter College though there Newton knew him only by sight, led to the foundation of a Brethren meeting for communion in 1834 at Salcombe in Devon, where Douglas lived. However Douglas’ sister became an Irvingite, persuaded him to meet Irving in London, and as a result a number of the Salcombe Brethren became Irvingites. Newton recalled that his prompt intervention reclaimed about two-thirds of the erring brethren. Douglas later became an “angel” in the Catholic Apostolic Church.¹³⁹ Wigram did not stay long at Plymouth, but moved to London, according to Newton because he was upset by the strife over the doctrines of the return of Christ and the rapture of the saints. The doctrinal differences between Hall and Wigram, which later became issues in the schism of 1845–1848, were exacerbated by the fact that while Hall was much the better preacher, Wigram owned the Chapel.¹⁴⁰ Wigram was in London by 1833, for he had by then established a Bible Reading meeting in Tichfield Street. Several of the London Brethren meetings owed their origin to him.¹⁴¹

It is worth commenting again finally that the meeting at Providence Chapel Plymouth was only one of several contemporaneous ecclesiastical experiments, largely arising from the recent secessions at Oxford. In January 1832, when public worship commenced there, Tiptaft’s Chapel was being built at Abingdon, Bulteel’s in Oxford, and Morshead’s at Bath, {78} while Irving was shortly to found his new community in London. It is nevertheless the case that while most of the other ecclesiastical ventures were destined to a speedy extinction – Irvingism to a more lingering one – “the brethren from Plymouth” became

134. H. Borlase, “Reasons for withdrawing from the Ministry of the Church of England”, Plymouth & London 1833. Reprinted with additions in 1836 as “Papers by the late Henry Borlase, connected with the present state of the church”, London 1836. This does not name the editors, but yet {243} another edition, in the Fry Collection, does so.

135. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 17–8; Exeter Diocesan Records.

136. Newton Memoirs p. 305.

137. Plymouth & Devonport Weekly Journal, 3/12/31.

138. S. P. Tregelles recalled in 1849 seeing a transcript in Wigram’s handwriting of such a letter: “Three Letters”, London 1849, footnote p. 5.

139. Newton Memoirs p. 141.

140. *ibid.* esp. pp. 238, 252, 254.

141. *ibid.* pp. 261 & 301.

representative of a movement which in one form or another was world-wide by the end of the century. This fact must go some way towards answering the question posed at the end of the first chapter, although it must be asked further to what extent the Dublin and Plymouth meetings truly represented the most permanent ideals of the movement. Although Dublin was the first meeting-place, and Plymouth gave its name to the movement, it could be strongly argued from subsequent history that the most permanent and catholic ideals of the Brethren movement stemmed from those elements in its origins represented by Bristol and Barnstaple, and these must be considered next.

(c) *Bristol and Barnstaple.*

Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, a member of the Plymouth meeting from the spring of 1835 and a scholar who was later widely known for his pioneer textual work on the New Testament, states that at the time of his joining there were eighty members “in fellowship” at Raleigh Street, and that the only other similar meetings for communion in England were at Salcombe and Bath.¹⁴² He omitted probably deliberately the meetings at Barnstaple and Bristol, at both of which places by 1835, although retaining traces of a formally-appointed ministry, former Baptist pastors had guided their congregations more or less into Brethren ideals and practices. The pastor {79} at Barnstaple was Robert Chapman, who having first qualified as an Attorney in London, was converted under the ministry of James Harington Evans and in 1832 accepted the pastorate of a small Strict Baptist congregation in Barnstaple, though Chapman himself was not a Strict Baptist.¹⁴³ The Bristol chapels were under George Müller and Henry Craik.

George Müller was born of a wealthy Prussian family near Halberstadt on 27th September 1805. After a profligate childhood he was converted in November 1825 and in due course, desiring to become a missionary to the Jews, he came to London and commenced training with the London Jews’ Society in March 1829. A fellow-student mentioned Groves, and Müller was greatly impressed by his example of self-sacrifice in giving up a lucrative profession in order to become a missionary. In May 1829 Müller fell ill, and after his recovery convalesced at Teignmouth. Here in July 1829, worshipping at the newly-opened Ebenezer Baptist Chapel, he met Henry Craik. Craik was the son of a minister of the Church of Scotland. He was born at Prestonpans on 8th August 1805, and after a successful academic career at St. Andrew’s University from 1820 to 1826 was engaged by Groves to act as private tutor in his household at Exeter. Craik held this post from August 1826 until spring 1828, when the Groves family moved to share house with the Paget sisters. He was then employed as tutor by John Synge, a local evangelical with estates at Teignmouth and at Glenmore Castle in County Wicklow. His meeting with Müller in 1829 commenced an unclouded friendship of thirty-seven years. It was cemented by Müller’s acceptance while at Teignmouth of the doctrines of election, perseverance, and the premillennial advent which Craik already held. Back in London in autumn 1829, {80} Müller found his doubts growing about whether he could accept the conditions of service of the missionary Society with which he was connected. Feeling at length that no form of human commissioning for God’s service should be necessary, and that in any case the servant of God should live “by faith” rather than by dependence on a regular

142. S. P. Tregelles, op. cit. note 138, Letter I.

143. F. Holmes, op. cit. note 11; H. Pickering (ed.), op. cit. note 12, pp. 26–30.

salary from an organisation, Müller dissolved his connection with the Society in January 1830. Early that year, preaching by invitation at the Teignmouth Chapel, he was asked to take the place of the retiring minister there, and Müller accepted this pastorate. On 7th October 1830 he married Mary Groves, sister of A. N. Groves. In April 1831 Craik left Synge's household to become the full-time pastor of Shaldon Baptist Chapel near Teignmouth, where he had already been preaching regularly; the two friends were thus close neighbours.

In the summer of 1829 an evangelical named Chapman from St. James' Church in Bristol visited Teignmouth and heard Craik preach at Shaldon. On his return he wrote several times asking Craik to go and live in Bristol, and eventually at the end of 1831 Craik stayed with Chapman for a fortnight and preached in various Bristol chapels. After his return to Devon, Chapman was even more pressing in his invitation, but Craik was prevented from accepting by the illness of his first wife, whom he had married in summer 1831. However, she died in February 1832, and when in March an urgent invitation to the pastorless Gideon Chapel arrived, Craik agreed to preach there for one month. He arrived in Bristol on 30th March, and the response to his preaching was such that he wrote on 12th April to ask Müller to join him, and a second chapel named Pithay was obtained for the two friends. Large crowds attended all the services; Craik and Müller were invited to {81} accept the joint pastorate, and after three weeks' consideration back in Devon, they arrived in Bristol on 25th May to commence an unbroken joint ministry of thirty-four years. Probably largely through the influence which Groves' ideas had had on both of them, in one case directly and in the other indirectly, Craik and Müller already held views of church order and ministry akin to those of the Brethren, and they made certain conditions upon their acceptance of the Bristol pastorate which some of the members of the congregation must have found unusual. These were that they should be regarded as having no fixed relationship as pastors with the congregation, but should be free to stay as long as they felt that God directed them; that they should have no fixed salary, but should depend solely on the voluntary private offerings of the congregation; and that pew-rents should be abolished. This last requirement was connected with the previous practice of ensuring the salary of the pastor by fixed and regular pew-rent income. Although the Gideon congregation accepted these conditions, Craik and Müller felt themselves to some extent limited by the existing practices of the congregation. However, a disused chapel named Bethesda in Bristol was also rented for the two friends, services starting there on 6th July 1832. Since they had originated the work at Bethesda, Craik and Müller felt that they could introduce there from the outset the views of church order and ministry which they held, even if they had to move with more caution at Gideon; and on the evening of Monday 13th August 1832 the two friends, with one other man and four ladies, united in church fellowship at Bethesda Chapel, in the words of Müller's diary "without any rules – desiring to act only as the Lord should be pleased to give light {82} through His word."

The conditions Craik and Müller made upon their acceptance of the Bristol pastorate were dictated by their principle of "living by faith" without dependence on human or material organisation. This principle was more of a protest than a logical position, the feelings of many evangelicals at this time being in reaction against what they felt to be the prevalent worldly over-cautiousness of the churches and missionary societies.¹⁴⁴ There was a direct line from Groves' tract of 1825, through Müller's severance of his connection

144. cf. H. Willmer, *op. cit.* note 4.

with the Jews' Society because he did not wish to depend for temporal support on a human organisation, to the famous Ashley Down Orphanages which were developed solely on the proceeds of "faith-giving". For some years boxes were provided at the doors of the Bristol Chapels for contributions to the support of the pastorate, but later all donations were made privately without appeal, Müller releasing public Accounts only at the end of each year. These principles of Christian service and giving appear to have been the most significant result of Groves' influence on the two men. Their desires for a more open communion fellowship were not at first so explicit, and Müller's views were influenced in a liberal direction by contact in 1835 with Chapman, who visited Bristol for two months in the autumn of that year to preach for the two friends when both were ill. Chapman's congregation at Barnstaple had suffered in 1834 a minority secession by more convinced Strict Baptists as a result of his efforts to broaden the basis of the communion fellowship. The caution shown at Bristol and Barnstaple in introducing less restriction of communion explains Darby's comment in his {83} letter of 15th October 1832, and a good deal of later criticism by Darby and other Brethren.

The predominantly Church of England origins of the Dublin and Plymouth meetings and the largely Baptist origins of Bristol and Barnstaple made a most delicate issue whether baptism as a believer should be a requirement for admission to communion and to full church fellowship. From the outset there was no such requirement at either Dublin or Plymouth – otherwise Darby himself would have been excluded – but that at the time of their arrival in Bristol the views of Craik and Müller were only halfway towards those of the Brethren is indicated by their ecclesiastical arrangements at Bethesda Chapel. Until 1837 full membership here was restricted to persons who had been baptised as believers, although the communion was open to all, and the introduction of open membership in that year caused a minority to leave. The change was introduced on the ground that there was "no scriptural distinction between being in fellowship with individuals and breaking bread with them". This conclusion embodied the same basic principle which had been adopted by the Brethren at Dublin and Plymouth some years earlier, that there is no distinction between membership of the Church of Christ and membership of a local church. Thus it was not until 1837 that Craik and Müller fully accepted one of the fundamental ecclesiastical principles of the Plymouth Brethren.

Early Brethrenism in general rested far more on aspirations towards a catholic communion fellowship actualising the unity of all true believers than on the principle of "liberty of ministry". However, the latter principle, with some qualification in the case of Plymouth, gained great {84} sway during the 1830s, partly because of Darby's championship of it and possibly partly through the influx of seceded Quakers. After 1848 it always remained the practice of all sections of the Brethren to invite those who seemed to have preaching gifts to speak at the services for gospel preaching, and such previous arrangements were not felt to thwart the liberty of action of the Holy Spirit, though the preaching was always expected to be extempore. The breaking-of-bread service, however, held invariably on a Sunday morning, was conducted after the fashion of a Quaker service of worship. Any male member of the congregation was free to lead in prayer, to announce a hymn of his choice, and to read or expound a passage of scripture. This practice of charismatic worship was not the original procedure at Aungier Street, and the more ordered form there only gradually gave way, though at Plymouth it may have been the practice from the outset. At Bristol and Barnstaple the congregations were led gradually to become accustomed to this free worship, but conservative elements produced difficulties, particularly at Gideon Chapel. In February 1839, fearing that a schism in their congregation over these matters was imminent, Craik and Müller left Bristol for two weeks' retreat in order

to consider the situation. Their conclusions were in favour of a recognised eldership in the church – a view which Darby was currently coming to reject – weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper, and “liberty of ministry” in connection with the ordinance. It may have been immediately after this that such liberty in worship was introduced at Gideon, but in view of the continuing dissatisfaction on the part of some, it was decided to relinquish the use of the chapel. The last services at Gideon were on 19th {85} April 1840, and thereafter Craik and Müller concentrated their work on Bethesda, although in October 1842 an overflow was obtained in the nearby Salem Chapel. The final step in the ecclesiastical development of Bethesda as a Brethren assembly was the removal in July 1841 of the offering-boxes bearing the names of Craik and Müller, thus removing any lingering implications of a separated ministry in the assembly.¹⁴⁵

It may not be unfair to draw a concluding comparison between the origins of the Brethren movement in Dublin and Plymouth and those in Bristol and Barnstaple. In the former cases the story is one of discontent, disaffection and experimentation, while in the latter it is much more one of the gradual development of principles. The men of Dublin and Plymouth wiped the slate clean and began anew; those of Bristol and Barnstaple began with an existing situation and moulded it. All the founders of the Brethren movement began with the conviction that their existing ecclesiastical circumstances were imperfect according to what they felt was the pattern prescribed in the New Testament, but the men of Dublin and Plymouth were the more radical in their immediate reaction to this situation. This is by no means to question the sincerity or the depth of insight of the earliest founders, but the comparison may contribute towards an understanding of the sequel. The foundations laid by Chapman, Craik and Müller may have been longer in building, but it may be felt that subsequent events proved them to be correspondingly more viable.

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(d) *Powerscourt*

A final element in the origins of the Plymouth Brethren as an ecclesiastical entity, which has so far been mentioned only in passing, was that of the Powerscourt Conferences for the study of biblical prophecy at which many of the early adherents of the movement met each other.¹⁴⁶ The two main influxes of prophetic interest into the Brethren movement came through John Bellett and Lady Powerscourt. Bellett visited London at the beginning of 1828, hearing in public and meeting in private those connected with the Drummond circle.¹⁴⁷ His interest in prophecy being thus awakened, on his return to Dublin he communicated his thoughts to Darby, who took up the subject avidly. In 1829 Darby published anonymously at Dublin a pamphlet entitled “Reflections upon the prophetic enquiry and the views advanced on it”. It is necessary to explain what an evangelical writing at this time meant by “the prophetic enquiry”. It had been widely believed by Christians aware of the vast potential of new methods of transport and printing that the whole world

145. The preceding pages rely heavily on accounts in various editions of “Narrative of the Lord’s dealings with George Müller”, by himself; W. E. Tayler, “Passages from the diary and letters of Henry Craik”, London (1866); the original diaries have been destroyed, except for 1863–5; A. Rendle Short, “The Diary of George Müller”, London 1954.

146. For a good description of the Powerscourt Conferences, see H. H. Rowdon, *op. cit.* note 105, pp. 158–180.

147. Bellett Recollections.

would be rapidly converted through education and evangelism, thus inaugurating the promised millennium, a man-made period of utopia at the end of which Christ would return. This was the “post-millennial” view, and envisaged a progressive improvement in the fortunes of the Christian Church. The horrors of the French Revolution and the apparent intractability of many non-Christian strongholds, combined to shake such optimism, and after 1815 a more pessimistic eschatology was gaining wide acceptance. This “premillennial” view taught that the world would not become better, but worse, until at the darkest hour Christ would return in glory and judgement to vindicate {87} His saints and to set up by direct divine intervention the millennial kingdom. Irving and McNeile became powerful protagonists of this view, as did all the Brethren; a measure of their influence was that by 1850 almost all evangelicals were premillennialists.¹⁴⁸ In the 1820s, therefore, there was considerable bewilderment among evangelicals about these matters. Charles Simeon is on record as being concerned by the prevalent diversion into the byways of prophetic speculation at the expense of the doctrines of salvation.¹⁴⁹ Darby’s pamphlet of 1829 is largely concerned with discussing the opposing views. Its moderate conclusion is that in any case the main object of faith of the church should be the hope of the literal return of Christ. Darby himself, if not already, was soon an ardent premillennialist.

Lady Powerscourt had been in contact with Henry Drummond and Edward Irving in England, and from autumn 1831 she convened annual conferences for the study of biblical prophecy, the first three of which, held at Powerscourt Castle under the chairmanship of Robert Daly, Rector of Powerscourt, were attended by hundreds of prominent evangelicals of various denominations. Newton, Darby, Bellett and other Irish Brethren attended from the outset, though Wigram was only at the first, since Darby appears to have written him an account of the 1832 conference in a letter to Plymouth¹⁵⁰ and he was conspicuous by his absence from the “summerhouse communion” at the 1833 conference. Craik and Müller attended the third conference, invited at the last moment by Synge on behalf of Lady Powerscourt. They left Bristol on 17th September and were given hospitality for several nights en route by Timms in Dublin and by Synge {88} at Glenmore Castle; Newton was also staying with Synge, from where he wrote to his mother at Plymouth on 23rd September.¹⁵¹ On Sunday 22nd September the Brethren met to break bread at Glenmore Castle. The meetings at Powerscourt extended from Monday to Friday 23rd to 27th September, and during the week Lady Powerscourt’s increasing sympathies with the Aungier Street Brethren prompted her suggestion that the six friends most closely connected with incipient Brethrenism should break bread together with her informally in a summerhouse on the Powerscourt estate. The seven present were Darby, Bellett, Hall, Newton, Craik, Müller and Lady Powerscourt; both Craik and Newton have left records of this occasion.¹⁵² In addition to the full-scale autumn conferences, Lady Powerscourt held evening meetings every second Tuesday of the month between 1831 and 1833, for the discussion

148. See F. R. Coad, *op. cit.* note 68; Froom, *op. cit.* note 68.

149. Letter to Miss E. E. 19/2/30 in Rev. W. Carus (ed.), “Memoirs of the life of the Rev. Charles Simeon”, 3rd edn. 1848 p. 459.

150. Letter of 15/10/32 in Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I pp. 5–11. The name of the recipient has been excised but the contents suggest it was Wigram.

151. W. E. Tayler, *op. cit.* note 145, pp. 166–7. Letter from Newton to his mother 23/9/33, original in the Fry Collection.

152. W. E. Tayler, *op. cit.* note 145, pp. 168 & 169; Newton Memoirs pp. 252 & 281.

of prophetic subjects, again with Daly in the chair.¹⁵³ In late 1833, partly because of her family's disapproval of her religious activities, she moved out of the Castle into a smaller house on the estate. Her secession to join the Aungier Street meeting, which at the time caused some local stir, may be safely assigned to late 1833 or early 1834, Darby's influence having prevailed over Daly's.¹⁵⁴ From 1834 to 1836 the conferences on prophecy were held in a Dublin hotel and were more specifically Brethren gatherings, with a much smaller attendance and presumably a greater breadth of doctrinal agreement. At the end of December 1836 Lady Powerscourt died, and future conferences were held in England, which implies that even after her move from the Castle she was still the financial stimulus for the meetings.

There were a number of other men, especially at the third conference, {89} who later became prominent among the Brethren. According to Craik's diary, W. G. Rhind was there, and Stoney's account of the 1833 conference in his postscript to the Bellett Recollections mentions Mahon of Ennis and Maunsell of Limerick, two men who gave hospitality and encouragement to Darby on his early itinerant preaching tours in the west of Ireland, and Sir Alexander Campbell, another of the early aristocratic adherents of the Brethren.¹⁵⁵ James Butler Stoney himself, later a prominent Exclusive, was born of a Protestant family at Portland, Co. Tipperary, in 1814. He attended Trinity College Dublin from 1829 to 1834, his conversion being precipitated by his fear of dying in the 1831 cholera epidemic in Dublin. After his conversion he began to study for ordination, but in 1833 came into contact with the Brethren through being invited to Aungier Street by a college friend named Clarke who was a constant attender there. Clarke later became an Irvingite, and Stoney himself at first followed the news of Irving's activities with interest; in 1833 Bellett brought Newton (= Stoney) to his rooms in Trinity in order to disabuse his mind of Irvingism. A particular address of Darby's at Aungier Street affected Stoney to such an extent that he joined the Brethren openly in 1834.¹⁵⁶

Consideration of the Powerscourt Conferences raises again the question of links between the Brethren movement and the Irvingites. Irving had been held in high esteem among evangelicals; Darby refers in his 1829 tract on prophecy to a "deeply interesting ... profitable and timely sermon of Mr. Irving's". Lady Powerscourt visited the first

153. Mrs H. Madden, "Memoir of Rev. Robert Daly", London 1875, p. 150. "Personal recollections of the Rt. Rev. Robert Daly D. D.", by an old parishioner, Dublin 1872, p. 18.

154. Richard, 6th Viscount Powerscourt, who had succeeded to the title on 9/8/23 on the death of his father, was 18 on 18/1/33. It does not therefore seem (as has been suggested) that Lady Powerscourt's removal {244} from the Castle was the direct result of his coming-of-age.

Mrs. H. Madden, *op. cit.* note 153, pp. 156–7, prints a letter to Daly dated 4/10/32 from an attender at the Powerscourt Conference who had later (presumably on Sunday 29/9/32) sampled Aungier Street without being impressed; Mrs Madden then states that of his congregation, Daly lost only Lady Powerscourt to the Brethren at Aungier Street. On her secession to join "the meeting of the discontented" see also "Personal recollections ..." (*op. cit.* note 153) pp. 22–3.

Lady Powerscourt's extremely emotional pietism may be judged from Rev. Robert Daly (ed.), "Letters and papers by the late Theodosia A. Viscountess Powerscourt", London 1838.

155. W. E. Tayler, *op. cit.* note 145, p. 167. The date of the conference referred to in Stoney's postscript to the Bellett Recollections is obscure and Neatby (*op. cit.* p. 39) assigns it to 1838, but Stoney says it was held "at Lady Powerscourt's" and that there were clergymen and Irvingites there; he was not in contact with Brethren before 1833, so this must be the 1833 Conference.

156. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 88–9; Stoney's note to Bell. Rec.

Albury Conference in 1826¹⁵⁷, though her name does not appear in the official list of those who were present¹⁵⁸, and in September 1830 Irving himself visited her at {90} Powerscourt Castle.¹⁵⁹ There were Irvingites present at the early Powerscourt Conferences, although their company was increasingly avoided by the Brethren after the appearance of Irving's unorthodox doctrine.¹⁶⁰ A number of early adherents of the Brethren movement later became Irvingites, including Clarke of Aungier Street, Douglas of Salcombe who rose to high office in the Catholic Apostolic Church, and a seceded Church of Ireland curate from Westport named Hardman of whom Darby speaks with approval in an early letter.¹⁶¹ Many other early members of the Brethren, even if they abhorred Irving's unorthodox doctrine and would never have considered joining the Irvingite church, shared his belief in the possibility of the reappearance of miraculous gifts in the church. Captain Hall was a powerful advocate of the "gifts". Newton was in constant dread of Irvingism appearing at Plymouth; Hall prayed repeatedly for the "gifts" to be bestowed upon them, and invited Irving to Plymouth, presumably in early 1832 soon after the beginning of the meeting at Providence Chapel. Irving refused, referring to the Plymouth meeting as "that slough of love", by which he meant that in his opinion the breadth of communion fellowship there overlooked vital doctrinal differences.¹⁶² In the preface to the first edition of Groves' Journal, which is not signed although it was obviously written by someone favourably disposed to, and well-known by, Groves and the Brethren circle, the hope is expressed that Groves will go on to exercise miraculous gifts in his ministry. The date is 1831: –

“... Every promise of the Lord Jesus Christ's, believed by this his servant, has been fulfilled, as will ever be the case, and we only have not, because when we ask, we do not expect to receive. May this {91} condescending tenderness of his Lord, in providing for the least of his wants, strengthen, and encourage our dear brother to go boldly forward, and to ask greater things than these, even that in the name of Jesus Christ, he may cast out devils, speak with new tongues, take up serpents, drink deadly things without hurt, lay hands on the sick, and they recover, be filled with the Holy Ghost and wisdom; and thus endued with power from on high, go forth preaching the gospel

157. Letter from Lady Powerscourt to Robert Daly in Mrs H. Madden, op. cit. note 153, p. 150.

158. Edward Miller, "The History and Doctrines of Irvingism", 2 vols. 1878, Vol. I pp. 40–1.

159. Mrs. F. W. Oliphant, op. cit. note 72, Vol. II pp. 148–150. Irving visited Powerscourt during a brief but spectacular preaching tour around Dublin: see "The Times", 18/9/30, p. 2 col. 6. It was probably this visit of Irving's which gave rise to the incorrect assertions that the first Powerscourt Conference was in autumn 1830 and that Irving attended it: e. g. in LeRoy Edwin Froom, op. cit. note 68, Vol. III footnote p. 585 & Vol. IV, p. 422 and p. 1223 with footnote.

160. Stoney's postscript to Bellett Recollections.

161. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 27 (letter of August 1833). Hardman was the eldest son of the M. P. for Drogheda, attended Trinity College Dublin 1816–1820; curate of Aughaval 1826, Ballincholla 1831. His licence was withdrawn December 1834 because he published an Irvingite tract, and he {245} died unmarried in 1839. (Irish Church Records).

Edward Hardman, "An exposition of chapters 12, 13 and 14 of 1 Corinthians with observations on the present state of the church", Dublin 1834.

cf. T. C. F. Stunt, art. cit. note 27; Sirr, op. cit. note 194, pp. 420–3.

162. Newton Memoirs pp. 252 & 257.

of the grace of God, the Lord working with him, and confirming the word with signs following.”¹⁶³

In November 1829 Groves recorded in his diary that he thought miraculous gifts were possible, and when the follow-up mission party was delayed at Aleppo in 1831 their reaction to Newman’s illness was to anoint him with oil and pray over him.¹⁶⁴ Parnell was a strong supporter of the Friday evening meetings for fasting and prayer which were held in late 1832 at Groves’ Mission Station in Bagdad after the arrival of the follow-up party from Aleppo. These were described much later as times of seeking the “manifestations of the Spirit’s presence and gifts”, and it is not at all unlikely that among the gifts sought were those of miraculous healing, since at that time Bagdad was just emerging from a devastating cholera epidemic.¹⁶⁵ Parnell’s reasons for abandoning missionary work and leaving India in 1837 are also significant; he felt that the lack of miraculous powers in the church cast almost insuperable difficulties in the path of any large-scale conversion of the heathen.¹⁶⁶ Once more appears the longing for New Testament days which affected many evangelicals at this time, and it was an obvious step for many of them, most articulately in Irvingism, to expect that once the ecclesiastical purity and {92} simplicity of the first century had been restored, the miraculous gifts of those days would likewise reappear. Such people felt that these gifts had been originally intended as permanent powers available to a faithful church, and that it had been only because of the church departing from its first principles that they had been inhibited so soon.

The credit for the suppression of Irvingite tendencies within the developing Brethren movement in England is almost certainly due to Newton and Darby. Both were strong opponents of such tendencies, Darby because he had been unconvinced by the “gifts” at Row, Newton because he had found most distasteful an Irvingite meeting [in London?] to which Bulteel had taken him in 1831.¹⁶⁷ Newton and Darby both wrote tracts against Irvingism as represented by the church in Newman Street.¹⁶⁸

163. A. N. Groves, op. cit. note 78, London 1831.

The second portion of Groves’ Journal, published in 1832, has a preface signed by A. J. Scott of Woolwich on 16/8/32; Scott later became an Irvingite. Although according to the B. M. L. Catalogue both Journals were edited by Scott, the styles of the two prefaces are different. It is not impossible that the first preface was by Hall.

164. “Journal ... during a journey from London to Bagdad”, pp. 99–100, entry for 11/11/29, still en route for Bagdad.

Groves mentioned the anointing in a letter of October 1831, printed in “Journal of a residence at Bagdad”, appendix p. 302. On the same page he states his view again about miracles: “With regard to miracles my mind is not at present prepared to embrace them fully: but this I do feel that the Apostle Paul, in Corinthians 12 and 14, when speaking of supernatural gifts for the edifying the church and doing the work of God, points them out as things to be desired and prayed for then, and if they were desired to be prayed for then, why not now?”

165. H. Groves, op. cit. note 85, p. 42.

166. *ibid.* p. 56.

167. Newton Memoirs pp. 134, 234, 235.

168. B. W. Newton, “Doctrines of the Church in Newman Street”, in “The Christian Witness” April 1835; later reprinted with amendments.

J. N. Darby, “A letter to a clergyman on the claims and doctrines of Newman Street”: in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Doctrinal Vol. iv*, pp. 24–51.

The importance of the Powerscourt Conferences as a factor in the crystallisation of the Plymouth Brethren as a distinct ecclesiastical unit should not be over-emphasised. The early conferences were in no sense Brethren gatherings, since quite apart from the fact that the movement as such had little sense of cohesion and common purpose until at least 1833, they were presided over by Daly who was a strict churchman (though an evangelical), and they were attended by several hundred evangelicals of various denominations. The Newton Memoirs recall that Lady Powerscourt called out the six to the summerhouse as being “differently-minded from the rest”, and the fact that as late as September 1833 there were only six out of an attendance of several hundred whom she considered to be sufficiently like-minded to join her in a breaking-of-bread service, is sufficient indication that the Conferences {93} were providing only the occasion and not the stimulus for the development of the Brethren movement. In addition, there was by no means unanimity of doctrinal interpretation at Powerscourt, even among the later Brethren themselves. At the end of the 1832 Conference Daly had a hard task to bring the meetings to a close in the right spirit; a verbatim report of his pacific speech is extant.¹⁶⁹ Newton’s opposition to the doctrine of the any-moment return of Christ and the rapture of the saints probably explains his absence after 1833, and it is possible that Wigram stayed away for similar reasons. From Monday to Saturday 15th to 20th September 1834 Newton, Harris, Borlase and Douglas convened their own conference on prophecy at the Mechanics’ Institute in Plymouth, at the same time and with the same subjects as the Dublin one. This may have been genuinely because the smaller venue of the Irish conference, and the difficulty and expense of travel, made it desirable to hold an overflow conference in England, but Darby seems to have treated it as a deliberate attempt to propagate opposing prophetic views, and Newton himself in his old age stated that this was its purpose.¹⁷⁰

The conferences from 1831 to 1833 were nevertheless an important background to the development of Brethren ideas. They provided a meeting-point for evangelicals of similar sentiments and interests, and an atmosphere of novelty and discovery in which experimental “New Testament Christianity” had an ideal breeding-ground. In the intensity of their common devotion and Biblical studies, denominational barriers must have seemed to the participants to matter little in the warmth of the fellowship generated. In his *Recollections* Bellett described the highly-charged {94} spiritual atmosphere at the conferences. They also assisted indirectly in the development of the Brethren movement because many of the later leaders met each other there. Bellett recalled that he met Wigram and Hall for the first time at Powerscourt, and they became co-workers with him in the movement – after 1848 among Exclusive Brethren – until the 1860s. Prophetic studies in themselves were not a formative influence among the Brethren as they were in Irvingism, and Neatby is unfair to call the Brethren ecclesiastical system “the child of the study of unfulfilled prophecy”.¹⁷¹ What Neatby calls the “haphazardism” of the Brethren fellowship may be ascribed not to their neglect of organisation because they did not anticipate the necessity for long-standing institutions if Christ’s return was imminent, but simply to their rejection of all forms of Christian tradition and their attempt to “begin again”. This meant that bridges were crossed as they appeared, and the Powerscourt Conferences did incidentally provide a forum for the discussion and development of common ecclesiastical principles.

169. Mrs H. Madden, *op. cit.* note 153, pp. 153–6.

170. Newton Memoirs, pp. 266 & 269.

171. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 339.

Chapter III

Expansion and consolidation: with special reference to the British Isles.

(a) *Reasons for expansion*

Several factors contributed to the growth of the Plymouth Brethren movement, once its rather nebulous start had gathered momentum, and the infant community had gained a sense of cohesion and mission. Not least was the fact that the movement appeared at a time of considerable domestic bitterness in the British church, largely fomented by politico-religious questions such as Catholic emancipation, the status of dissenters, and the future of the Establishment in view of the inevitable political reform. In the case of evangelicals, discontent often took by reaction the form of a complete rejection of any association between secular politics and religion, and the desire to establish a church free from all “worldly associations”. The Brethren claimed to represent an attempt to embody this “pure church”, and their idealism, if odious to some, proved itself attractive to others. Similarly, their claim to actualise a wider Christian unity than any other community gained them many adherents in the early years. In addition, they appealed to an awakening historical sense in the claim to be restoring the ecclesiastical simplicity of the church as it had existed in New Testament days. These claims did not necessarily reinforce each other. It is abundantly clear that just as different crisis-points motivated the secessions of the founders, so those who joined the movement later often found its appeal mainly in only one of [96] its various idealistic claims. This may seem an obvious comment, but it is a particularly important one in view of the later divergence of ideals in the schism of 1848. Without constitution, creed or canons, and perhaps especially without any representative organ capable of declaring common policy, the Plymouth Brethren movement in its early years could – and did – hold together Christians with quite widely-differing aspirations.

Another element in early Brethren polemic which deserves extended comment because it has so rarely been noticed by those who have written about the movement, was that of pacifism. Groves’ final reason for abandoning ordination has been mentioned, and his pacifist viewpoint is clear from several of his writings.¹⁷² Brethren annals record a number of instances where young Army or Navy officers were converted, and it seems always to be assumed that an inevitable result of their conversion was that they left the Service.¹⁷³ Pacifist views were not new in the 1830s, but the educated founders of the Brethren gave them more able and articulate public expression than previously. One of the fullest expositions of this viewpoint was given by Hall in a lengthy tract entitled “Discipleship! or reasons for resigning his naval rank and pay”. The Christian must be separate from the world and reject its “powers, its distinctions, its honours and its riches”. Naval rank is authority from the power of this world, whose standards and values mean

172. [246] e.g. “Memoir of the late A. N. Groves”, London 1856, pp. 32, 33, 162 et al.

173. e.g. in H. Pickering (ed.), op. cit. note 21: P. F. Hall (p. 20); J. G. Deck (p. 37); G. V. Wigram (p. 41); R. F. Kingscote (p.74).

nothing to the Christian. In addition, war itself is wrong; if ever force to redress wrong could have been justified, it would have been when Jesus was crucified. We cannot justify war on the grounds of expediency. Towards the end of the tract it becomes clear that Hall's argument for eschewing {97} secular associations is passing over into a plea for Christians to secede from the established church; the two situations coalesce in his mind. Using the phraseology which has by now become familiar, Hall closes his tract with an emotional appeal to his still-unenlightened evangelical brethren to "flee out of the midst of Babylon ... that ye be not partakers of her sins". His description of the Church of England was probably shared, though rarely expressed in such extreme terms, by many of the Brethren:

"Oh it is a sad and heart-breaking sight to see that which declares itself to be the bride of the lowly and homeless Jesus, covered with the titles and honours of this world – the crimson and gold of the harlot, instead of the white and unstained garments of faithful love ... to see (Christians) labouring in the counsels of the ungodly, striving to be Lords, Bishops, Members of Parliament, Mayors, Reverends, or anything else that will bring man's honour ..."¹⁷⁴

The extent to which the pacifist ideal among the Brethren provided an attractive force towards them in the 1830s and 1840s cannot be gauged, but it seems certain that it lubricated the accession of evangelical Quakers in the late 1830s, since Quakers were traditionally known for their pacifist views. In addition William Trotter and Joseph Barker, especially the latter, whose stories will be told in connection with the accession to the Plymouth Brethren in 1841–1843 of disaffected members of the Methodist New Connexion, were advocates of non-resistance; Barker admitted having been influenced by reading Brethren tracts. An early statement of Darby's views on the subject cannot be found, but we have an interesting letter written in French in 1870 with reference to the {98} Franco-Prussian War. In this Darby discusses the dilemma of the Christian faced with compulsory conscription, and deplors the prevalent selfish patriotism inflamed by conflicts of this kind. His views seem moderate and practical, and allow freedom for the individual conscience:

"It is clear to me that a Christian, free to do as he will, could never be a soldier, unless he were at the very bottom of the scale, and ignorant of the christian position. It is another thing when one is forced to it. In such a case the question is this: is the conscience so strongly implicated on the negative side of the question, that one could not be a soldier without violating that which is the rule for conscience – the word of God? In that case we bear the consequences; we must be faithful.

"What pains me is the manner in which the idea of one's country has taken possession of the hearts of some brethren. I quite understand that the sentiment of patriotism may be strong in the heart of a man ... At bottom, human affection must have a centre, which is "I". I can say, "My country" ... But God delivers us from the "I"; He makes of God, and of God in Christ, the centre of all; and the Christian, if consistent, declares plainly that he seeks a country – a better, that is to say, a heavenly country. His affections, his ties, his citizenship, are above ...

174. P. F. Hall, *op. cit.* note 12. Lancelot Brenton was also a pacifist: see his long preface to "Memoir of Vice Admiral Sir Jahleel Brenton, re-edited by his son", London & Ryde 1855, pp. x, xii et al.

“As a man, I would have fought obstinately for my country, and would never have given way, God knows; but as a Christian I believe and feel myself to be outside all; these things move me no more. The hand of God is in them; I recognise it; He has ordered all beforehand. I bow my head before that will. If England were to be invaded to-morrow, I should trust in Him. It would be a chastisement upon this people who have never seen {99} war, but I would bend before His will”.¹⁷⁵

The quarterly publication “The Christian Witness” circulated outside acknowledged Brethren circles and provided an important platform for the spread of their views, although it confined itself almost entirely to doctrinal and ecclesiastical questions. It cannot be compared with the “newsy” denominational magazines; the contributions were anonymous – though a number of them were reprints of separate tracts whose authorship was perfectly well-known among the Brethren – and there was no “general intelligence” section dealing with personal matters. It seems therefore to have been designed primarily for circulation outside the movement. There were twenty-nine issues in all, from January 1834 to January 1841 inclusive; Borlase edited the first two issues and Harris the rest. The main contributors were Darby, Newton, Hall, Wigram, Bellett and Harris. Groves’ letters from the East appeared in the second issue, Tregelles contributed several times in 1836, and Lancelot Brenton wrote in 1837. The first issue included an article by Harris suggesting that the extent and variety of Christian ministry had been limited by confining it to a single individual, and that a broader conception would allow the exercise of all the various gifts in the church. Darby’s tract on the nature and unity of the church was also reprinted in this issue. In the second issue Harris’ themes recurred in an article by Darby entitled “The Christian liberty of preaching and teaching the Lord Jesus Christ”, which sought to show that any distinction between laymen and clergymen was unwarranted by scripture. Articles advocating the premillennial view of prophecy and attacking the optimistic view of the gradual improvement of the world, began with an article by Borlase entitled “Present Prospects” in the first issue, and {100} especially abounded in the middle issues. The last two issues in particular supported Newton’s views on the organisation of the local church as against Darby’s, advocating a recognised eldership and a stated ministry. There were no articles by Müller, Craik or Chapman, no doubt due partly to the magazine’s local origin at Plymouth, but probably also partly to their incomplete alignment with the Brethren community until towards the end of the period of publication.¹⁷⁶

The distinguished social position of many of the earliest members of the Brethren exerted considerable influence on its expansion and on the development of its ethos. An analysis of those of the prominent Brethren listed in “Chief Men among the Brethren” who were born before 1820, who joined the movement in its early years, and who remained within it until the end of their lives, shows that of the forty-four whose social background is given, twelve were either clergymen or were in training for the ministry before joining the Brethren, five were Free Church ministers, four were lawyers, twelve were landowners or had private income from family estates – these included five titled gentry – four were doctors, schoolmasters or private tutors, five were businessmen, one was an actor and one an artist. Eight of the forty-four had at some time sought or

175. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. II pp. 130–2.

176. The volumes in the possession of Mr. F. R. Coad are reliably annotated with authors’ names except for 1839 and 1841, and in view of Darby’s increasing criticism of the publication it seems likely that most of the articles in these later years originated in Plymouth.

achieved commissions as Army or Navy officers.¹⁷⁷ The upper-class connections of the original Dublin and Plymouth congregations have already been mentioned, and the meetings' continued to attract a good proportion of people of this kind. The subsequent dignified restraint and sense of decorum in Brethren worship and social convention stemmed in no small measure from the character of its early membership. For all {101} her fervour, it is difficult to imagine Lady Powerscourt finding it bearable to worship with the "unsightly few" at Aungier Street, as Stoney describes them¹⁷⁸, unless this was the case at the outset in Dublin. The high social standing of many of the founders brought several advantages to the movement. First, it meant that there was usually ample local publicity when a new meeting began – reports in local papers, polemic sermons in Parish Churches, possibly a war of pamphlets. Second, it meant that there were usually ample funds available for the building of a meeting-place – as at Tottenham in 1839 and Hull in 1844 – or at least that there was a large house available where religious worship could be held temporarily, as at Hereford. Third, the presence within each infant community of educated and wealthy persons ensured an articulate and effective polemic in tracts and preaching. Very often the local leader wrote and published, perhaps largely at his own expense, a tract setting forth Brethren principles, as did Harris at Plymstock in 1832, Hall at Hereford and Hargrove at Westport in 1836, Dorman in London in 1838, and Jukes at Hull in 1844. Of course as time went on an increasing percentage of humble people was to be found in the meetings, especially in rural districts of the West Country, and later in Suffolk. The austerity of Brethren worship and their willingness to meet for worship if necessary in bizarre places such as barns and hay-lofts, made it easier for poorly-dressed country people to attend their meetings. There were certainly poor people in Chapman's congregation in Barnstaple¹⁷⁹, and in the same area itinerated almost the only genuine country evangelist of humble origin among the Brethren, Robert Gribble.¹⁸⁰ However, although they {102} had some success in predominantly agricultural communities, the Brethren made very little impact on the labouring classes of industrial society. Their failure in this respect was hardly worse than that of the rest of the church in Britain – even the Primitive Methodists and the Particular Baptists, traditionally renowned for their working-class appeal, did not in fact have large numbers of such people, though they did make the attempt to reach them. The Congregationalists and Quakers did not at this time exhibit a great desire to evangelise the working classes, and, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century almost the only church which was increasing markedly its numbers of working-class adherents was the Roman Catholic, even this increase being due largely to Irish immigration.¹⁸¹

Another factor in the expansion of the Plymouth Brethren was a real evangelistic concern on the part of many adherents, of which Hall's open-air preaching in the villages around Plymouth and Darby's early labours in Ireland are good examples. Nevertheless the movement often appeared to be more interested in the enlightenment of believers than in the conversion of unbelievers. After the collapse of the initial venture, the ill-fated mission to Bagdad, no pioneer overseas missionary work was attempted among the Breth-

177. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21.

178. Postscript to *Bellett Recollections*.

179. F. Holmes, *op. cit.* note 11, Chs. III & V.

180. R. Gribble, "Recollections of an evangelist, or, incidents connected with village ministry", London 1858.

181. K. S. Inglis, "Churches and the working classes in Victorian England", London 1963, *introdn.* pp. 12–20 *et al.*

ren until long after the 1848 schism. Darby's indefatigable labours in France and French-speaking Switzerland do not qualify, for he invariably worked from within existing Christian communities, soon earning for the Brethren in general and for himself in particular a reputation for proselytising which was very largely deserved. Even at Bristol, which probably represented the most catholic and evangelistic elements among the Brethren, it is clear from studying Müller's Annual Reports that on {103} average half the added membership each year was from other churches, and only half by conversion directly into the Brethren. With regard to overseas missionary evangelism, Groves was almost the exception that proved the rule, and even he was never able to fully absolve himself from the charge of proselytising in his missionary work in India. The most universal criticism of the Brethren movement by its opponents in the mid-nineteenth century was that it tended to poach existing evangelical Christians from other churches.¹⁸²

The claim of the Brethren to embody a wider unity of Christian believers than was elsewhere available, which gained them many adherents in the early 1830s, was increasingly overshadowed in those sections of the movement where Darby's influence predominated, by the allied call to "separate from evil". The term "evil" was increasingly used to refer not primarily to moral but to doctrinal and especially ecclesiastical error. The emphasis in Brethren apologetic then lay more on attempting to show the inadequacy and inconsistency of non-Brethren forms of Christianity, than on presenting persuasively the ideal of unity. This shift of emphasis will receive considerable further comment, but for the moment it is sufficient to state that whether the positive or the negative motive was dominant in any particular situation, the Brethren were able to absorb large numbers of discontented evangelicals from other churches. Darby's pre-eminent position in the expansion of the movement in Ireland and later on the Continent is indicated by the fact that in these places the Brethren were commonly referred to as "Darbyites" (Darbyistes, Darbisten) while in England the usual title was generated by the focus of preaching and {104} publication at Plymouth. The Brethren themselves, of course, insisted that they accepted no description save that common to all Christians – "brethren".

The Brethren possessed various advantages over earlier experiments in the field of "New Testament Christianity". Their social composition contrasted favourably with that of the Glasites and the churches of the "New York Correspondence", and they were mostly men of education, which probably explains why they avoided practices deriving from an extremely literal interpretation of the scriptures, such as foot-washing and the kiss of peace. Irvingism also attracted a cultured clientèle, although those who actually spoke in "tongues" were usually of the poorer classes, and a noticeable change of emphasis in worship from emotionalism to mysticism took place gradually after Irving's death. The more open emotional opportunities in Irvingism were initially generated by the vividly imaginative temperament of the founder, whereas the originators of the Brethren were mostly men of restraint. Unlike the Irvingites, the Brethren avoided the pitfall of allowing prophetic studies to take such a prominent part in their programme that their ecclesiastical existence depended upon a particular expectation. In the early days at least, there was a degree of doctrinal tolerance among the Brethren most nearly approached by the Kellyites, and certainly not achieved by groups like the Glasites and Walkerites.

The specific course which the development of a Brethren assembly took depended almost entirely on the energy and insight of gifted local leaders. With the notable excep-

182. It is only fair to point out, however, that Open Brethren after 1860 possess a noble record of overseas missionary work, and even the Exclusives had their evangelists, such as C. H. Mackintosh and C. Stanley.

tions of Bristol and Barnstaple, where existing Christian communities were gradually moulded into the Brethren pattern, {105} the meetings almost everywhere began with evangelical discontent leading to the secession of a few key individuals. Groups of disciples gathered round these men, and in the course of time regular meetings for worship were established which became more or less aligned with the Brethren community at large. In the absence of formal organisation and lists of accredited meetings, the greatest single factor in the achievement of this alignment and a degree of coherence among the scattered assemblies was the itinerant preaching of Darby. He travelled widely among the meetings in the 1830s, until the death of Lady Powerscourt mostly in Ireland and thereafter mostly on the Continent. Most of the other Brethren leaders were more or less stationary although Newton, Müller and Craik visited various places to preach by invitation. Regional conferences for Bible study, the annual successors of the Powerscourt prophetic conferences, and the circulation of tracts and “The Christian Witness”, were almost certainly all of less importance than these personal contacts in establishing a sense of family unity among the scattered Brethren meetings.

The consolidation and expansion of the Brethren movement was therefore effected not by the creation of a formal organisation or representative body, which Brethren universally rejected, but by the influence of personalities known widely among the meetings, by apologetic preaching and publication, and especially by an often conscious capitalising on evangelical discontent in the call to reject all compromise and association with the “world” and in the claim to express a true Christian unity. However, in the absence of formal administrative machinery it was inevitable that an informal power structure grew up among the meetings. {106} This was embodied locally in men who although nominally equal with their brethren were in fact the real and effective leaders of their communities. This informal leadership was often generated in practical ways: such men had been the first or the most prominent seceders from the local Parish Church, they were the wealthier and better-educated members of the community, they owned the Chapel where the Brethren met, they bore the responsibility for communion discipline and for inviting visiting preachers. At a wider level those of the prominent Brethren most disposed to travel and to minister in different places came to exert far-reaching influence by sheer personal charisma, especially if they were identified with the movement’s very beginnings, which were already being viewed by many with an almost Pentecostal significance. By far the most outstanding of these itinerant leaders was Darby, whose increasing personal authority in the movement rested in no way upon formal position, but simply upon the esteem in which he was held as a spiritual guide.

(b) *Two London meetings in the 1840s.*

One of the earliest sympathetic but objective descriptions of a Brethren meeting which has survived, is that of the Tottenham assembly in 1840. This meeting was one of the largest in London and was fairly typical, although its largely Quaker origins affect the emphases in the description, and the catholic outlook of the Brethren at Tottenham resulted in 1849 in its alignment with the Open Brethren:

“There is an *apparent* difficulty in learning what their tenets are: for they refuse to set forth any creed or {107} form of church government: they profess to act as individuals, and that their church, *as such*, holds no notions. Their fundamental tenet is the same as that of the Society of Friends, viz. that the energies of the Holy Spirit are still given

to the church in so emphatic and peculiar a mode, as to make all church arrangements for education unlawful. They do not attack bad organisation, but organisation as such. They hold, that no edification can be expected by a church which is *claiming the Spirit* by a fixed ministry, and they assign this as an adequate ground why all dissenters should break away from their existing connections ... There is no designation of particular persons to preach and teach, as it is considered that ordination (such as is mentioned in the commission given to *Titus* to ordain elders) must proceed, not from those governed, but from some higher authority in the church, and this source of authority is considered to be lost, through the lapsed state of the universal *catholic* church. Yet it is considered that only those should teach, or preach the gospel, who are specially gifted for that end. At the meeting *for worship* it is open to any of the Brethren to read, pray or speak; but on other occasions, someone in whom the Brethren place confidence, undertakes the service ... They consider that Christ appointed that all His disciples should form *one visible church*, and think that the present divided state of true Christians, originated in sinful sectarianism, which is deeply to be lamented ... They cannot recognise the *one true church* in any of the different denominations of Christians ... They admit to their communion, any whom they can believe to be true Christians, excluding none on the ground of minor differences of opinion ...”¹⁸³

{108} This description indicates two elements which remained constant in all sections of the Brethren, even after 1848: the complete rejection of a formally-appointed ministry, and the practice of charismatic worship especially in connection with the Lord’s Supper service. The Brethren’s objection to the formal democratic election of ministers by their congregations was their primary criticism of the Independents, while it is clear that an informal acknowledgement of preaching gifts remained necessary. There is also a clear echo of Darby’s doctrine of the “ruin of the church” with the consequent loss of its power to make formal appointments.

Another useful description of Brethren worship, though this time not contemporary, was written by a man who had been brought up among the Brethren from the age of six but who in his mid-thirties had seceded to join the Church of England. He writes in 1872 a description of the Great College Street, Camden Town, meeting of Brethren as seen about 1845 through the eyes of a boy of eleven:

“My first impressions of the meetings to which I was then taken, are even now more vividly in my memory than are those of two or three years ago ...

“The table near the middle of the room, covered with a large white tablecloth; the uncut and unbroken loaf; the ordinary glass decanter of wine and two drinking glasses; the benches on each side facing the table, with side forms for us children, and two or three separated from the rest at one end, set apart for non-members; on the back of the first bench from these separated ones, a notice board {109} fixed: – “Persons known as breaking bread to sit beyond this board”; the serious, even solemn entrance of one after another; the long time they were, as a rule, on their knees engaged in prayer before they took their seats; the silence, often long, not to say oppres-

183. William Robinson, “The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Tottenham”, 2nd edn. 1840, Vol. II pp. 297–304. The first eleven lines of this description (as quoted in my text) are a free quotation from a hostile article about the Plymouth Brethren in the *Eclectic Review* for May 1839. The two alterations worthy of note are that in the original, in l. 7 for “education” read “edification” and in l. 9 for “claiming the Spirit” read “chaining the Spirit”. These corrections make the sense of the description much clearer.

sive, that ensued before anything was said or done; the silence broken at last by some one giving out a hymn; silence again of long or short duration, most of those present with eyes closed as if in deep devotion; then perhaps a prayer from some one in another part of the room; then perhaps, from someone else in another place, a passage of scripture, with or without comment; but almost invariably with a considerable period of silence between each act, all culminating in the chief act of their worship: “the breaking of bread”. One of their number, any one who was so moved, going up to the table, and, after a short prayer or perhaps a few words of scripture bearing upon the subject as well, taking the ordinary loaf of bread, breaking it in half and handing one half to one side of the table and the other half to the other side; one receiver passing it on to the next and so on till all had partaken by breaking off a small piece and eating it; then the last receiver bringing it back to the table, or if the last were a woman, handing it to the nearest man to take back; the wine in two glasses passing round in the same manner, and then the box for collections; after this perhaps another hymn, or another prayer or both, or possibly a few words of teaching from some brother, or from more than one; the proceedings generally ending with “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” &c ...”¹⁸⁴

One can imagine the vivid impression made by this service on an intelligent boy forced to be a regular spectator of it, and the faithfulness {110} to detail of the description is obvious. It is worth commenting that except for the kneeling and the notice-board, Brethren communion services have been celebrated in an identical manner ever since, even down to details. Though they eschewed tradition, the Brethren were not long in establishing their own, and their communion liturgy was as fixed as an official absence of liturgy can be.¹⁸⁵

The writer of this description, William Townsend, had been baptised among the Brethren by Lord Congleton at the age of sixteen, first “broke bread” two years later (about 1852), and subsequently oscillated between Open and Exclusive Brethren meetings until his doubts about the Brethren’s claim to the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit in the impulsive charismatic worship of the Lord’s Supper led him to leave the community and join the Church of England about 1870. His description of his eighteen years in communion with the Brethren is lucid and sympathetic, and is a most valuable document. He mentions incidentally that in the Great College Street meeting, just as at Tottenham, it was the custom to assign the Sunday evening services for gospel preaching to those who were known to have preaching gifts. The few occasions when this had been left to immediate impulse had been unsuccessful, and prior arrangement was therefore the custom, although there was the feeling that this was too much like “system”. It is clear that by the mid-1840s these practices had become normative throughout the Brethren community: a breaking-of-bread service each Sunday morning, with charismatic worship although along clearly-defined lines, and a service for gospel preaching to the unconverted on Sunday evening, the preacher being previously appointed.

184. William Townsend, “Church and dissent: being reflections and reasonings that have induced the author, after eighteen years’ communion among the Plymouth Brethren, to leave them, and enter the communion of the Church of England.” 1872, revised edition Lewes 1880. (in B. M. L.)

185. {247} cf. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 328–9.

{111} (c) *Areas of expansion – the British Isles.*

In the 1830s there were three main fields of expansion of the Brethren movement: Darby's widespread itinerant preaching, and linked with him the work of his staunch ally Wigram in London; the areas around Bristol and Barnstaple; and the area around Plymouth. Apart from a number of isolated meetings, some originating in the Quaker secessions of 1835–1837, the origins of most Brethren meetings can be traced to one or other of these sources. In the early 1840s a further field of expansion arose among disaffected members of the Methodist New Connexion, mostly in Yorkshire.

Darby enjoyed a comfortable annuity after 1834 under his father's will¹⁸⁶, and he also had a small regular income from a £2000 investment in Irish Government stock left to him by an uncle; his gross estate exceeded £5000 when he died in 1882.¹⁸⁷ He was almost certainly also assisted with finance and hospitality by the congregations he visited. His extant letters of 1833 and 1834 are all from Ireland, and during this period he was unable to meet Francis Newman on the latter's return from the East, which suggests that he was not in England.¹⁸⁸ One of the factors affecting his remaining in Ireland was probably his deepening friendship with Lady Powerscourt. Legends about this romance are still current among Exclusive Brethren; it is said that the two wished to marry, but that Darby's friends dissuaded him on the grounds that his itinerant ministry would suffer. Lady Powerscourt died in December 1836, reputedly of a broken heart, and thereafter Darby spent little time in Ireland, but turned his attention far away to Switzerland.¹⁸⁹ Before her death, Darby was often at Limerick, where a Brethren meeting was started at the end of **{112}** 1832 and grew rapidly. A comment of Darby's about this meeting in a letter of April 1833 gives another indication that even a year after the start of the Plymouth meeting he was not yet fully committed to the building up of the Brethren as a separate Christian community. It seems that the Limerick meeting – presumably for communion – had previously gathered at eight in the morning, and the numbers had multiplied so much that a new place of meeting was necessary. One was offered, and at the same time it was proposed to change the time of meeting to twelve, the same time as other local church services. Darby wrote: "This is a cause of anxiety to me, whilst I wait on the Lord's will, for I feel the importance of the moral character of the step ..." ¹⁹⁰ In other words, as long as the meeting did not clash with other church services, like the early Methodist Society meetings, it could be claimed that it was only an expression of fellowship and that far from being a rival to the existing churches, it was an auxiliary to them. This position could no longer be maintained once the meeting became an alternative to existing institutions. Darby's anxiety here was similar to that shown by Bellett in Dublin in 1830, and by himself and Newton in Plymouth in 1832. He was aware that the apparently minor matter of a change in time would inevitably lead to a definite break with existing affiliations and the

186. *ibid.* footnote p. 78. Darby's father died in 1834: D. N. B.

187. J. J. Herzog, "Les frères de Plymouth", Lausanne 1845, p. 7.
Copy of Darby's Will in the Sibthorpe Collection.

188. Letters of J. N. D. Vols. I & III; F. W. Newman, *op. cit.* note 94, p. 56.

189. Some of the legends about this romance are in F. Cuendet, "Souvenez-vous de vos conducteurs", 1935, a pamphlet circulating among Darbyite communities in France, esp. pp. 9–12.

190. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I pp. 21–2. cf. *ibid.* pp. 17, 18–9.

establishment of a new Christian community. By the end of 1832 meetings had also commenced at Ennis in Co. Clare and at Rathkeale in Co. Limerick, though almost certainly on a small scale and initially in private houses.¹⁹¹ It seems that Darby's hesitation finally vanished during 1833, for in a letter of July 1834 he refers to Bellett having recently returned from visiting the "churches or {113} little bodies" in the south-west of Ireland.¹⁹² Bellett's visit probably included Bandon in Co. Cork where his brother George was Rector. There was a public meeting of Brethren at Bandon by 1843 although George Bellett never seceded from the established church.¹⁹³

The best-documented example of the formation of a Brethren assembly by a block secession from the established church in Ireland is that which occurred at Westport in Co. Mayo in 1836. The key figure in this secession was an evangelical curate named Charles Hargrove, who had known at least Bellett for some time through their mutual interest in the establishment of a Protestant missionary settlement on the island of Achill off the west coast of Ireland.¹⁹⁴ There were at that time four churches in the union of Westport, the nearest mainland town to Achill, with a non-resident evangelical incumbent named Thomas Grace who died in 1835. In 1833 Archbishop Trench of Tuam, also a moderate evangelical, sent Hargrove and Rev. John Marsden Code as curates to Westport. Both were strong evangelicals, and when in February 1835 a Plymouth Brother named Hirschfield arrived at Westport, they allowed him to lecture in the church schoolroom. Trench wrote asking that he should be denied the use of the pulpit and the schoolroom, and Hirschfield left Westport in September 1835. Meanwhile Code and Hargrove, chafing at what they felt to be the impure communion fellowship of the established church, which by resting everything on formal profession allowed the wheat and the chaff to be inextricably confused, began a meeting for Bible ministry at which views approximating to those of the Brethren were advanced. On 30th October Hargrove wrote to Trench resigning, and shortly afterwards left Westport. In December a new {114} incumbent named Pounden was appointed, but no sooner had he arrived at Westport than a group of discontented evangelicals in the congregation wrote to Hargrove asking him to return and establish a meeting of the Brethren. Hargrove had suffered an accident, so he asked Darby to go instead. Darby arrived at the end of January 1836, closely followed by Hargrove. A private meeting was held between the new incumbent, who had been inducted on 22nd January, the remaining curate Code, Hargrove, Darby, and Rev. Joseph d'Arcy Sirr, Rector of Kilcoleman, a nearby parish, who represented the Archbishop. A few days later Code resigned and joined the Brethren; he latterly lived at Cork, and from 1840 was a leading figure among the Brethren at Bath. Hargrove published his reasons for retiring from the ministry, Sirr responding with three tracts opposing secession. Hargrove's main reasons were the evil union of Church and State leading to worldliness in the church, and the absence of a genuine communion discipline, exemplified in the fact that if the church were faithful, one of the first people it would excommunicate would be William IV. Hargrove also expressed dislike of the Baptismal, Ordination and Burial Services as resting upon formal outward profession what could be conferred only by inward decision and commit-

191. *ibid.* p. 13.

192. *ibid.* p. 31.

193. D. J. Beattie, *op. cit.* note 15, p. 301.

194. Robert Daly, Charles Hargrove and John Bellett were among those present at a meeting held in Dublin on 1/9/31 to discuss the possibility of a settlement: J. d'Arcy Sirr, "Memoir of the honourable and most reverend Power Le Poer Trench last Archbishop of Tuam", Dublin 1845, p. 599.

ment. He claimed that the primary duty of the Christian should be “separation from evil” in the form of doctrinal and ecclesiastical error.¹⁹⁵ These reasons show a distinct change of emphasis from those which motivated most of the earliest Brethren, who sought to show positively the unity of Christian believers rather than to witness against what they felt to be error in the churches. This change seems to have taken place gradually as the movement developed, and was {115} probably inevitable once there was a sufficient number of assemblies, with a great enough sense of cohesion, for Brethren to feel themselves part of a distinct ecclesiastical unit which should be supported for its own sake – in spite of their claim that they intended to found no new sect, but met solely as “brethren”. It seems certain that the change of emphasis was due in no small part to the proselytising activities of Darby at Westport and elsewhere, and it was most marked among those meetings where his influence was strong and in the new ones he founded.

Groves had taken no part in the development of the Brethren movement as a distinct entity, since he had left England in 1829. Because of the detachment following from his extended absence during the crucial formative period, he was more able than anyone else to see the signs of the shift of emphasis when he returned to England in autumn 1834. He stayed for fifteen months, during which time he accompanied Müller on a visit to Germany to rally support for his missionary work, and he moved freely among the Brethren at Bristol, Plymouth and Dublin. He met Darby on only a few occasions, and it is clear that he was already aware of a considerable difference of outlook between them on the subject of Christian communion, for on the eve of his departure for India from Milford Haven, on 10th March 1836, he wrote a sadly prophetic letter to Darby which is a very important document in view of the later history of the Brethren.¹⁹⁶ Groves had noticed the change of emphasis in the infant meetings, particularly those where Darby’s influence was strong, away from witnessing to the positive truth of the unity of believers and towards the necessity for witnessing against error in church order and doctrine {116} and separating oneself from it. Groves had been accused of changing his principles by Wigram, Cronin, Hall and others during his stay in England, but he suggests that it is Darby who has departed from the original ideals propounded at the outset in Dublin. Groves states that these were the desire to acknowledge the common life of the family of God in every Christian and group of Christians, joining with every such body as far as conscience would allow while not necessarily endorsing all their doctrines or practices, and to follow the apostolic rule of not judging other men’s consciences, the watchword being union rather than separation. The new tendency to support the Brethren movement as an ecclesiastical unit for its own sake is characterised by Groves as sectarian:

“There is something at present so like building what you destroyed; as if when weak you can be liberal and large, but when holpen with a little strength, the true spirit of

195. Charles Hargrove, “Reasons for retiring from the established church”, 2nd edn. London 1838.

J. d’Arcy Sirr, “A dissuasive from separation: A letter to some wavering friends at Westport”, Dublin 3/2/36; ——— “Reasons for abiding in the established church – A letter to Rev. Charles Hargrove”, Dublin 1836; ——— “Westport Darbyism exposed”, Dublin 1843; ——— “A letter to Rev. P. Pouden”, Dublin 19/4/43 (refuting Code’s tract “The Church of Ephesus” which in turn had been a reply to a tract by Pouden.)

See also Sirr, *op. cit.* note 194, ch. VII.

196. Reproduced in full in “Memoir of ... A. N. Groves”, by his widow, 2nd edn. 1857, appendix pp. 538ff. Various words in this letter are italicised differently in other quotations and it is not certain which (if any) were Groves’ original italics; all have been omitted in this quotation.

sectarianism begins to bud; that being “one of us” has become a stronger bond than oneness in the power of the life of God in the soul”.

Groves’ warning contains four main elements, all of which were abundantly demonstrated in later years in the development of Exclusivism. The first is that in principle Darby is “returning to the city whence he departed”. The implication here is that Darby’s earlier high churchmanship is reappearing in his increasing tendency to demand doctrinal correctness as a prerequisite for admission to fellowship: “making light not life the measure of communion.” – “your union daily becoming one of doctrine and opinion more than life and love.” – “you will see all the evils of the systems from which you profess to be separated, to spring up among {117} yourselves.” Darby might have replied that even from the very first days of the movement a minimum of correct doctrine had been needed to qualify a person for admission to communion, since there must be some criterion of belief by which to test the validity of a person’s Christian experience. It seems certain however that while at first this minimum was that common to all evangelical Christians, it was considerably widened as the movement developed, until to qualify for admission to regular church fellowship among the Brethren a man needed to share their views on a wider range of subjects – probably especially on the matter of “separation”. Second, Groves warns that the Brethren will come to be known more for what they witness against than for what they witness for: “practically this will prove that you witness against all but yourselves, as certainly as the Walkerites or Glassites.” – “The transition your little bodies have undergone, in no longer standing forth the witnesses for the glorious and simple truth, so much as standing forth witnesses against all that they judge error, have lowered them in my apprehension from heaven to earth in their position as witnesses.” This was a remarkably accurate prophecy of the public image of the Brethren later in the century. Third, Groves warns of the danger that this tendency gives every opportunity for bigotry and the prominence of human authority: “The moment the witnessing for the common life as our bond gives place to a witnessing against errors by separation of persons and preaching ... every individual or society of individuals, first comes before the mind as those who might need witnessing against, and all their conduct and principles have first to be examined and approved before they can be received; and the position which this {118} occupying the seat of judgement will place you in will be this: the most narrow-minded and bigoted will rule, because his conscience cannot and will not give way, and therefore the more enlarged heart must yield.” Finally, Groves lays the personal charge against Darby that the infant meetings are looking to him as their founder when they should be looking only to Christ as their head.

This letter sheds important light on the development of Darby’s thinking in this crucial formative period of the Brethren movement. In October 1832 he had written with reference to his desire for a wider basis of communion at the Bristol chapels “I dread narrowness of heart more than anything for the church of Christ, *especially now*.” From the context it is clear that the last phrase refers to the recent founding of the Plymouth meeting for communion.¹⁹⁷ In April 1833 he was even more explicit in writing a letter from Ireland to the church at Plymouth:

“I feel daily more the importance of the Christians at P(lymouth), and I do trust that you will keep infinitely far from sectarianism ... You are nothing, nobody, but Christians, and the moment you cease to be an available mount of communion for any con-

197. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 10.

sistent Christian, you will go to pieces or help the evil.” (i. e. the evil of a divided church).¹⁹⁸

While Darby stood by what he had written years earlier, to the extent of allowing these letters to circulate freely among Exclusives, he came to believe that a “consistent Christian” could only be one who had separated himself from “systems” – the term used among the Brethren to denote what they felt were the unscriptural ecclesiastical arrangements of the organised churches. It seems likely that his own final separation from the ministry of the {119} Established Church contributed to his adoption of a more narrow view of Christian fellowship. This conclusion is suggested by the fact that while Bellett considered him to be only “all but detached from the Church of England” as late as 1834, Darby’s views had changed so much by 1836 that he wrote a pamphlet entitled “The connexion of the term clergy with the penal guilt of the present dispensation, and the sin against the Holy Ghost.”¹⁹⁹ The main theme of this tract is that the popular conception of a clergyman as standing in some sense as a mediator between God and men is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and Darby states that “every clergyman is contributing to this” – presumably by continuing to officiate as a clergyman, even if personally repudiating the popular notion. By this criterion there could be no fellowship even between evangelical clergymen and the Brethren, and the principle extends by a short step to evangelical laymen. Darby’s extreme views were gradually accepted by the majority of the Brethren, though Bristol and Barnstaple continued to represent more catholic and liberal ideals.

Very little documentary evidence has survived about the origins of the London meetings of the Brethren in the 1830s, except for the Tottenham meeting whose archives are in existence although not available for study. The Newton Memoirs state that their founding was largely due to Wigram, who moved from Plymouth to London in late 1833 or early 1834; a letter of Darby’s dated July 1834 contains a passing mention that he imagines Wigram has now left Plymouth permanently.²⁰⁰ It also seems likely from the Newton Memoirs that these early London meetings began as Bible Readings in private houses and then expanded into permanent gatherings for worship. {120} In 1838 the Brethren movement in London gained several notable accessions. In June of that year the young minister of Islington Independent Chapel, William Henry Dorman, resigned to join the Brethren.²⁰¹ He rapidly became a leading member of the meeting at Rawstorne Street, and from 1848 to 1866 was a prominent Exclusive Brother.²⁰² In 1838 also the Howard brothers commenced their Brethren meeting at Tottenham. The origins of this meeting seem independent and there is no evidence to connect Darby or Wigram with them. There was a sizeable Quaker community at Tottenham and a large meeting-house seating several hundred.²⁰³ Among the local seceders from the Quaker movement at the time of the “Beacon” controversy, which will shortly be described, were Luke Howard, the eminent meteorologist,

198. *ibid.* p. 21.

199. See note 98. Although Darby did not publish this till about 1873, Sirr had seen it in 1836: “Reasons for abiding ...” (note 195) p. 162 & footnote.

200. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 32.

201. {248} W. H. Dorman, “Principles of truth on the present state of the church; also reasons for retiring from the independent or congregational body”, London, 1838.

202. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 124ff. & 242ff.

203. William Robinson, *op. cit.* note 183, p. 297. Robinson says the Quaker meeting-house held 600; the 1851 Religious Census Return says 350.

and his family. One of his two sons, John Eliot Howard, was baptised on 28th July 1836 and after resigning his connection with the Quakers in October, temporarily joined Tottenham Baptist Chapel, first taking the communion there on 4th December 1836. He then engaged in evangelistic preaching in local villages, but in 1838 began holding regular evening meetings in Tottenham, presumably for gospel preaching. On 4th November 1838 the first meeting for communion was held in a small room in Warner Terrace. In June 1839 this was transferred to a chapel seating 150 which he had built at Brook Street, Tottenham. In 1842 there were 88 in fellowship at this chapel, and on 30th March 1851 the morning attendance was 140.²⁰⁴ Meanwhile some of the earliest founders of the Brethren movement had settled in London. Cronin lived at Brixton and attended the Kennington meeting, while Lord Congleton lived in London from 1842 to 1846, attending the Rawstorne Street meeting, and again {121} from 1849, when he was associated with the Open meeting at Orchard Street.²⁰⁵ In central London in March 1851 the two largest meetings were at Rawstorne Street Hall, Clerkenwell, and in a converted house in Kennington Place, Lambeth, with morning attendances on 30th March of 300 and 180 respectively. These were both Exclusive meetings, and Rawstorne Street was especially important since it was Darby's regular place of worship when he was in London. The other meetings of Brethren in central London, with morning attendances on 30th March 1851 bracketed, were as follows: Orchard Street, Marylebone (55); College Street, St. Pancras (40); Stepney (30); Hoxton Old Town (30); and in a hired Infant Schoolroom in Kensington (20). The Orchard Street and College Street meetings were Open (note ²⁰⁶), and the meeting at Stepney was probably also Open since its Census Return was signed "deacon", a term which would have been unlikely to have been used by an Exclusive assembly in view of Darby's well-known opposition to any recognised offices in the church. The Census Returns indicate the existence of two other undenominational meetings, at Temperance Hall, Hammersmith (28) and at Providence Chapel, St. Pancras (60) which may also have been connected with the Brethren. (note ²⁰⁷)

The Brethren were in a peculiarly difficult position with regard to the Returns presented for completion on the occasion of the Census of Religious Worship in England and Wales in 1851. The Quakers were provided with a special form whose wording was designed to avoid difficulty of conscience, but Brethren meetings were given the usual Returns for nonconformist churches. These included a column for the insertion of "religious denomination", spaces for estimated attendances at the services {122} on Sunday 30th March 1851, and a column for "remarks". In the first column most Brethren meetings wrote "Christians", usually with a specific disclaimer of any further distinctive or denominational title; a very few, mostly Returns apparently completed by less well-educated men, wrote "Plymouth Brethren". The Irvingites also found themselves in difficulties over

204. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 58–60; D. J. Beattie, *op. cit.* note 15, p. 79; Religious Census Return, H. O. 129/5/137.

205. H. Groves, *op. cit.* note 85. According to Groves, when Lord Congleton attended Rawstorne Street in 1843, it was the custom to begin Sunday with a 7 a. m. Prayer Meeting, followed by breakfast laid in the meeting room for brethren who had travelled from various parts of London, then to hold the service for breaking-of-bread at 10.30 a. m.

The Orchard Street meeting was moved to Welbeck Street in the 1860s.

206. D. J. Beattie, *op. cit.* note 15, p. 110; W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 177; William Townsend, *op. cit.* note 184, *passim*.

207. Religious Census Returns, H. O. 129/1/1, 7, 9, 15, 20, 24, 31.

the “denomination” column on the Returns; by agreement, most Irvingite churches described themselves as “the one holy catholic and apostolic church”. This, like “brethren”, was never intended as a denominational title, but as a protest against sectarian ascriptions. The “remarks” columns on many Irvingite Returns echo the Brethren plea for unsectarian Christianity. In both cases, the self-descriptions came to be used as denominational titles. Among the Brethren the “remarks” columns were often used to specify the ground of meeting as a common belief in the Lord Jesus and to state the absence of an official or ordained ministry. The greatest difficulty, however, arose over the problem of who should complete and sign the Return on behalf of the meeting, and the results cast further light on the informal power structure in existence especially among Exclusives, since the signatures often indicate the effective leaders of meetings; thus Percy Hall signed for the Exclusive meeting at Hereford, William Trotter at York and John Willans at Leeds. A space was provided thus for the insertion of the “official character” of the signer: “_____ of the above-named place of worship”. A few Brethren ignored this space, a few others wrote “none” or a specific disclaimer of official title in the “remarks”. Howard at Tottenham wrote with literal truth “proprietor”, Hall at Hereford wrote “teacher”. Some Exclusives wrote {123} “manager” (e. g. Kennington) or “steward” (e. g. Rawstorne Street), these terms clearly being employed with pointed reference to the building and effects rather than to authority of any spiritual nature; in these cases the signers were probably not leading figures in the meetings. Among the Open Brethren the terms “deacon” and “servant” were often employed; the noun “minister” was never used on its own, although the verb was in common usage among Brethren. William Trotter went so far as to describe himself on the York Exclusive Return as “one of the ministers of the gospel preaching in ...”

Details of the individual Returns were not released at the time, and the Summary Tables included in the Census Report published in 1853 are inaccurate, often listing as Plymouth Brethren congregations of Joseph Barker’s ex-Methodist New Connexion “Christian Brethren” in the northern counties, and even some “United Brethren” or Moravians. For example, two sizeable Plymouth Brethren meetings according to the Summary Tables were at Huntingdon, which was in fact a congregation of “Christian Dissenters” with an official ministry, and at Haverfordwest, which was Moravian. In both these cases, and numbers of others, the Registrars were obviously misled by the use of the word “brethren” in the self-description by the churches. On the other hand, a number of genuine Plymouth Brethren meetings were omitted from the Summary Tables, especially if they did not use the word “brethren” when completing the Returns. The correct allocation of doubtful cases appears very often to have depended upon the knowledge of the local Census Officers. The figure given by the Census Report of 132 Brethren meetings in England and Wales must therefore {124} be treated with caution, although the errors in both directions probably combined to give a reasonably accurate total of public meetings. In addition to these, however, it seems certain that there were a number of small meetings for communion in private houses in places where circumstances had not yet allowed the establishment of public worship. From the Returns it is not possible to tell directly whether a particular meeting was Open or Exclusive, since these words were never used; recognition of the signature may indicate the alignment, and use of the titles “elder” or “deacon” are usually distinctive of Open Brethren, though not all Open meetings did employ these descriptions.

The regional distribution of Brethren assemblies in 1851 suggests that where Calvinistic Dissent already had a strong representation, the Brethren found little foothold.²⁰⁸ Independency was strong in Essex and Suffolk, the Particular Baptists in the Home Counties – Oxford, Berkshire, Buckingham, Cambridge and Middlesex. There was also a strong representation of Wesleyan Methodism in the Midlands. In the majority of these counties the Brethren were very weak; there were no meetings at all in Derby, Nottingham, Lincoln, Leicester, Rutland, Norfolk, Cambridge, Huntingdon, Buckingham and Hertford, and only one each in Essex, Bedford, Berkshire, Oxford, Northampton, Warwick and Worcester. In the south-east there were two meetings in Kent, none in Surrey or Sussex²⁰⁹, and one in Hampshire. This regional arrangement, with the assemblies in the northern counties largely cut off, and even the London meetings separated considerably from the West Country concentration, was an important factor in the schism of 1848, when personal contacts and links between meetings {125} naturally contributed a good deal to the outcome. In the main, Darby's influence was strongest in the north and in London, and this was reflected in the fact that the majority of these meetings became Exclusive while most of those in the West Country became Open, with of course specific exceptions on both sides. In 1851 the greatest concentration of meetings was in Devon, which had 36, nearly one-third of the total in England. The success of the Brethren here was possibly partly due to the almost complete collapse of the once-strong Presbyterianism through Unitarian tendencies.²¹⁰ The combined influence of Plymouth and Barnstaple upon this evangelical vacuum made Devonshire then, and ever since, the stronghold of rural Brethrenism. The next largest group was seventeen meetings in Yorkshire, fourteen of them in the West Riding, though a number of these may have been Barker's "Christian Brethren". These were almost all Exclusive in 1851, and their origin will shortly be considered. Then came twelve meetings in Somerset and eight in Gloucester, mainly through the Bristol origin; six in Cornwall; five each in Lancashire, Cheshire, Stafford (some in each of these three were probably not Plymouth Brethren, but Barker's "Christian Brethren"), Hereford, Wiltshire and Middlesex; three each in Shropshire and Suffolk; two each in Cumberland and Kent; and one each in ten other English Counties.

Half the Brethren meetings in England in 1851 were in the West Country, this concentration having arisen from the three foci at Plymouth, Barnstaple and Bristol. At Barnstaple Chapman was wont to baptise converts publicly in the Taw, a procedure which aroused considerable local interest and sometimes opposition.²¹¹ Probably his most illustrious candidate {126} was Count Guicciardini, an Italian nobleman who had been forced to leave his native Tuscany in 1851 because he had held evangelical meetings. In England the Count worshipped with the Open Brethren, for a time at Teignmouth, where he was the instrument of conversion of his fellow-countryman T. P. Rossetti. Both Italians later

208. Information in this paragraph taken from Summary Tables of Religious Census Report (1853), with particular corrections where known (e. g. Huntingdon & Haverfordwest), and cautions where errors seem likely.

209. In fact there was probably a meeting at Brighton: Lord Congleton lived there 1846–9, and William Townsend attended a meeting there in the early 1860s; H. Groves, *op. cit.* note 85, W. Townsend, *op. cit.* note 184.

210. D. Bogue & J. Bennett, "History of Dissenters", Vol. IV, 1809, p. 319.

211. F. Holmes, *op. cit.* note 11, p. 57.

returned to their homeland where a number of Brethren assemblies were established.²¹² Chapman took a prominent part in the disputes of 1845–1848 though in a liberal and pacific spirit, suggesting that Darby had acted precipitately in forcing schism, and after 1848 he was firmly aligned with Open Brethren. He spent most of his time in his pastoral ministry at Barnstaple, but in 1848 toured Brethren meetings in Ireland, and in 1871 spent eight months in Spain, establishing missionary connections which Open Brethren still retain. Chapman lived until June 1902 and died in his hundredth year amid the universal respect and affection of the Open Brethren community, among whom he was known latterly as “the Barnstaple patriarch”. Legends about him still abound in Devonshire assemblies. Further east there were in 1851 two large and flourishing meetings of Brethren at Yeovil and East Coker (morning attendances on 30/3/51 respectively 130 and 60 adults) where the leading figure was William Dyer, late of Ebrington Street Plymouth, who signed both Returns as “habitually preaching in the above-named room”.²¹³

Müller and Craik had considerable numerical success in their work at Bristol. In the first 2½ years of their joint ministry, from 1832 to the end of 1834, 227 new members were added to the Chapels of Gideon and Bethesda, about half of whom were new converts and the rest of whom had either joined the Brethren from other Bristol churches or moved into the {127} district. By 1837 there were 370 persons in fellowship, approximately equally divided between the Chapels. In 1866, after Gideon had been abandoned, there were 900 in fellowship at Bethesda.²¹⁴ Many other chapels were opened in the course of time, and Bristol has always remained one of the strongholds of the Open Brethren, the 1959 list of assemblies naming twenty-four meetings in Bristol city alone. Much of the interest and respect gained by Müller in the Christian community at large, however, was due not to his labours as pastor but to his well-known social work in the establishment of the Ashley Down Orphanages, to which after 1834 by far the greatest part of his attention was devoted. He spent nearly all his time until 1875 in Bristol, where Craik died in 1866, though he visited Germany for some weeks in 1835 and 1840, and again from August 1843 to March 1844. On this last visit he established a small Brethren meeting of twenty-five seceded Baptists at Stuttgart, but this small beginning was later dwarfed by Darby’s work in Germany.²¹⁵ The Orphan Homes at Bristol were the first major venture in Britain operated on the sole principle of “faith-giving”. Müller believed that specific needs should be made known only to God in prayer, Who could be expected to provide what was necessary at the time it was required. No appeals for funds or even statements of needs were ever made, though at the end of each year accounts were published, and Müller’s “Narrative of the Lord’s dealings” abounds with instances of dramatic eleventh-hour provision, even of food for the next meal.²¹⁶ His views on financing Christian action had been influenced by Groves and by the example of A. H. Francke, the Halle Divinity Professor who had founded a similar orphanage in 1696. The first Orphan {128} House was opened in April 1836 in rented premises in Wilson Street Bristol, three others being subsequently opened in the same street. In 1845 Müller decided that completely new pre-

212. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 47–54. The Count took with him back to Italy a vast quantity of Brethren tracts and other evangelical literature, which is now in the National Library at Florence.

213. H. O. 129/13/319.

214. Müller’s Annual Reports from 1834; H. Groves, “Darbyism: its rise and development, & a review of ‘The Bethesda Question’”, Lond. n. d. (1866) p. 27.

215. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 95–100.

216. A similar detailed record of Divine provision appears in an appendix to R. Gribble, *op. cit.* note 180.

mises were necessary, and building was started at a new site on Ashley Down on 5th July 1847. On 18th June 1849 children began to transfer to the new building, which had cost in all nearly £15,000. It is significant that it was at the very time when Müller was intensely preoccupied with the building of the new House – an amazing venture of faith considering the amount of capital involved – that the crisis within the Brethren community reached its climax in Darby’s “Bethesda Circular” of August 1848. Müller’s impatience with domestic quarrels in the church is understandable at such a time, and this needs to be remembered when the story of the schism is told. Müller’s annual gift income rose from a few hundred pounds to thousands annually; in 1856 he recorded that during twenty-two years he had received a total of over £113,000 without a single public appeal for funds. The majority of this had been used in the foundation and upkeep of the Orphan Homes, though the amount included the temporal support of Müller and Craik as pastors. Further new Orphan Homes were opened on the Ashley Down site in November 1857, March 1862, November 1868 and January 1870, until ultimately two thousand orphans at one time were being cared for in them. Not a little of the stimulus for the expansion of the Brethren movement in the Bristol area arose from the contagious enthusiasm and devotion generated by the spectacular success of Müller’s venture of faith.

The third West Country focus was at Plymouth, where Newton was the leading figure after the departure of Wigram and Hall. The main meeting {129} grew fast, and in 1840 a chapel holding one thousand was opened in Ebrington Street, the main services being transferred there while the Raleigh Street Chapel was used for evangelistic services and prayer meetings. The latter was owned by Wigram, but the new one was the joint property of Newton, Harris and H. W. Soltau^{216a}, which explains why Darby could commence a rival meeting at Raleigh Street in 1845 while the main congregation continued to use Ebrington Street. Spreading out from Plymouth daughter meetings were started, amongst the earliest being those at Salcombe, Devonport and Stonehouse. The two Plymouth meetings did not describe themselves as Plymouth Brethren in 1851, and were not recorded as such in the Census Report, but the latter does list meetings – with morning attendances on 30/3/51 bracketed – as follows: Exeter (150), six in or near Newton Abbot (total 201), five each in or near Kingsbridge (total 288) and Crediton (total 320), three at Okehampton (total 104), two each at Plympton (total 53) and Liskeard (total 61), and Totnes (30).

One strand of Brethren expansion, in the Hereford and Monmouth areas, stemmed from Plymouth through the preaching of Hall. The evangelical incumbent of St. Peter’s Church Hereford, Henry Gipps, died in 1832, and his successor John Venn, son of the John Venn of the Clapham Sect, although not a high churchman, did not entirely satisfy the evangelicals in the congregation. These included Mr. & Mrs. William Yapp and Dr. & Mrs. J. Griffiths all of whom later became prominent among Open Brethren. Visiting Plymouth about 1835, Mrs. Griffiths heard Captain Hall preaching, and as a result he was invited to give a series of Bible Readings at Yapp’s house in Bridge Street Hereford in 1836. These so impressed the local evangelicals {130} that Hall and his family were persuaded to move permanently to Hereford, and they took up residence at Breinton, three miles from the city, in summer 1837. Regular public meetings for worship and communion were begun in a room at the rear of Yapp’s house, which in 1838 had to be enlarged because of the large numbers attending. Yapp’s own secession from the Parish Church must have contributed materially to this spectacular expansion, as he was a prominent local

216a. S. P. Tregelles, *op. cit.* note 138, footnote p. 17.

figure, being Secretary of the local Protestant Association as well as holding other church offices. As late as the middle of July 1837 he was Secretary of the St. Peter's Church Sunday School building committee. Dr. Griffiths was also a well-known local figure.²¹⁷ The extent of the local disaffection of evangelicals from the Parish Church is further indicated by the fact that in 1838 two other new dissenting Chapels were opened in Hereford – the Baptist on 13th April and the Primitive Methodist on 24th June.²¹⁸ Darby visited the Hereford meeting of Brethren in 1838, and Newton and Parnell also preached there; Rhind was at Hereford from 1838 to 1842, and Thomas Maunsell from Limerick settled there in 1850. Spreading out from Hereford, meetings were started at Ross-on-Wye in 1844, through the removal there of Rhind the previous year, and in due course in several neighbouring villages. Most of the meetings in this area had strong contacts with the Bristol area assemblies through preaching visits, and most of them became Open meetings after 1848. In Hereford itself in 1850 Hall and a minority of the assembly seceded to form an Exclusive meeting, but the main group continued to worship at Bridge Street until 1858, when Barton Hall was opened.²¹⁹ Neither Hereford meeting appeared as Plymouth Brethren in {131} the 1853 Census Report, but the actual Returns give the estimated morning attendances on 30/3/51 as 250 at the Open meeting, whose Return was signed by Yapp as a “servant”, and 30 at the Exclusive meeting at a room in St. Owen Street. The Census Report lists Brethren meetings (morning attendances on 30th March bracketed) at the following places: Ross-on-Wye (100), Ledbury (6), Bromyard (70), Leominster (45), Stroud (80) and Gloucester (50). Among the meetings not listed in the Summary Tables, but included among the actual Returns, were the “Plemouth Bretheren” (sic) at Eaton Bishop (39) and a small evening gospel meeting at St. Devereux. (note ²²⁰)

The origins of the Brethren meetings in Westmorland can be traced definitely, and of that at Wellington in Somerset with reasonable certainty, to the secession of evangelical Quakers as a result of the “Beacon” controversy in 1835–1837. Isaac Crewdson, an evangelical Quaker who lived at Ardwick near Manchester although his family home was at Kendal, published at the end of 1834 a tract of 150 pages entitled “A Beacon to the Society of Friends” which advocated a definite evangelical position with regard to the Bible and the atonement, and in particular criticised “the delusive doctrine of the inner light” and the emphasis on silent worship. This tract was generally welcomed by evangelicals in other denominations, and received favourable reviews in April and May 1835 in the Scottish Congregational Magazine, the Baptist Magazine, the Wesleyan Magazine and the London Congregational Magazine. Among the Quakers, however, it brought to the surface a long-latent division between the advocates of a “higher Quakerism” which stressed the importance of the “inner light” more than the orthodox evangelical doctrines of justification {132} by faith and substitutionary atonement, and the evangelical supporters of these doctrines. A vigorous exchange of correspondence and tracts ensued within the

217. {249} Hereford Journal, 19/10/36, 30/11/36, 7/12/36, 22/3/37, 19/7/37.

218. *ibid.* 18/4/38 & 27/6/38. There is, however, no meeting of Brethren mentioned up to the end of 1838, which confirms that it was taking place in a private house.

219. D. J. Beattie, *op. cit.* note 15, pp. 35–40. Beattie suggests that a factor in the split at Hereford was Dr. Griffiths' preference for evangelistic meetings while Hall favoured Bible teaching meetings; apparently Hall's minority group did not immediately adopt Darby's “Bethesda discipline”: cf. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 199.

See also H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 138–140 on Yapp.

220. H. O. 129/14/346–7–8.

Quaker community in England, commencing with a letter in January 1835 from Thomas Thompson of Liverpool to Crewdson. A reply to this taking Crewdson's part was written the following month by Isaac Braithwaite of Kendal.²²¹ Supporters of Crewdson published in 1835 a tract giving extracts from favourable reviews of the "Beacon". This quotes some information given in articles of March and April 1835 in the *Scottish Congregational Magazine* about the numerical strength of the Quakers in Britain. Of the eighteen thousand in England and Wales the greatest proportion are said to be in Durham, Yorkshire and Lancashire. The strife arising from the publication of the "Beacon" is said to be worst in Lancashire where of the 1800 Quakers about 600 each are at Manchester and Liverpool, the latter town being a stronghold of "higher Quakerism". There are about 700 Quakers in Westmorland, of whom 300 mostly with evangelical views are at Kendal; a considerable number at Wellington in Somerset hold the same views.²²² During 1835 the controversy gathered momentum. At the Yearly Meeting in London one of the leading British Quakers, J. J. Gurney, spoke emphatically in favour of the evangelical viewpoint. The Yearly Meeting appointed a committee of thirteen which paid visits to Manchester in June, August and December 1835, finally recommending that Crewdson should refrain from public ministry and from attendance at meetings for ministers and elders. The eventual result was that several hundred evangelical Quakers joined Crewdson in leaving the movement.²²³ According to Quaker historians a number of these joined {133} the Church of England and the remainder the Plymouth Brethren.²²⁴ The question of "the ordinances" of baptism and the Lord's Supper became central as the controversy progressed, and a number of Quakers resigned, or were effectively expelled from the movement, because they accepted these practices. One of the most prominent seceders on these grounds was Luke Howard.²²⁵ The early Brethren were very interested in the dispute, and Newton, who was a well-informed critic because of his long Quaker family background, struck in during 1835 with a tract welcoming the "Beacon" and arguing the case for the evangelical doctrines.²²⁶

Interesting light is shed upon the connections between the seceding Quakers and the Brethren, by the "general intelligence" sections of a monthly journal entitled "The Inquirer" published from 1838 to 1840, whose significant motto was "What saith the scripture?"²²⁷ It seems that this was produced by a group of evangelical Quakers in London for circulation within the movement and among the seceders from it. News of the activities of the Yearly Meeting is given, though much of the "general intelligence" concerns seceded Quakers. John Eliot Howard of Tottenham was almost certainly one of the sponsoring group, and he wrote several leading articles or "letters to the editors" under the pseudonym *Asyncritus*; he may also have been "IEH" who wrote the leading article in the first

221. Letters by Thompson and Braithwaite, dated respectively 23/1/35 and 19/2/35, in one tract: B. M. L. 908.e.3 (7).

222. Tract containing extracts: B. M. L. 4152.aa.60 (3).

223. "The whole correspondence between the committee of the Yearly Meeting of Friends, and Isaac Crewdson", 1836: B. M. L. 4152.aa.60 (4).

224. e. g. R. M. Jones, *op. cit.* note 50, Vol. I p. 508.

225. "An appeal to the Christian Public against a sentence of disownment passed upon a member by the Society of Friends, for absenting himself from their silent meetings, and submitting to the ordinances of Christ." (by L. H.) London 1838.

226. B. W. Newton, "A Remonstrance to the Society of Friends", Plymouth 1835.

227. The issues of this periodical have fortunately survived, in three bound volumes, in B. M. L. P.P.735.

issue entitled “Sacrifice”.²²⁸ The general intelligence section of the January 1838 issue gives an important survey of the disaffected groups of Quakers which clearly indicates their trend towards the Brethren:

“Some of them, perhaps to the number of fifty, attracted by the sound evangelical ministry they have found in the Church of England, in their {134} particular neighbourhoods, especially in London, at the chapel of B. W. Noel, and in Liverpool, at that of H. M’Neil, have joined the Establishment; a few have attached themselves to the Methodist Society, and two have become ministers among them; while others have associated in religious worship, or have joined Independent or Baptist churches. The larger part who have left, however, remain unconnected with any of the existing bodies of Christians, although united in Gospel bonds with all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity ... many have believed it to be their Christian duty, in obedience to their Lord’s command, to observe the rite of baptism, and to break bread in remembrance of Him.”

At the end of the February 1838 issue the recent baptisms of a number of evangelical Quakers are listed: one at the Baptist Chapel in Wellington on 30/6/37; one at the Baptist Chapel, Exeter, on 14/8/37, the officiant being B. W. Newton; two more Quakers from Wellington on 25/8/37 by Mr. Davis, the Baptist minister of Tottenham; four at Bethesda Chapel Bristol on 4/10/37 by Henry Craik; and seven at Manchester on 25/1/38 including Elizabeth Crewdson, the wife of Isaac. The baptism on 2/6/38 by Rev. Mr. Norton, a Baptist minister, of W. D. Crewdson, apparently the head of the family in Kendal, is recorded at some length in the July 1838 issue. A brief notice at the end of this issue recommends Beverley’s “Letters on the Present State of the visible church”. Before his period among the Quakers, R. M. Beverley (who then resided in the town of the same name in the East Riding of Yorkshire) had been a layman of the Church of England who had attracted considerable attention by publishing a trenchant tract about the worldliness of the Bishops which ran through at least seventeen {135} editions.²²⁹ According to the November 1838 issue of “The Inquirer”, Beverley was baptised on 4/10/38 by Bulteel at Oxford, sufficient in itself to show that he was not then a member of the Brethren, and his “Letters” of 1838 appear to make criticisms of all the various denominations, though being sympathetic towards the Quakers.²³⁰ He is mentioned again in the journal in mid-1839, where it is stated that his views are approximating more closely to those of the Brethren, and it was not long before he was fully associated with the Brethren in Yorkshire. An undated tract of his probably published in late 1840 or early 1841 sets out to answer the question “Why do you worship with the people whom they call ‘The Brethren?’”²³¹ The point of

228. The three main contributions by Asyncritus are letters to the Editors, forming the leading articles in October, November and December 1838; the first two are entitled “Baptism” and the third “The Inward Light”. There are poems by “J. H.” in May and June 1838, and a letter from Luke Howard about his expulsion appears in the February 1838 issue.

229. R. M. Beverley, “A letter to His Grace the Archbishop of York on the present corrupt state of the Church of England”, 17th ed. Beverley 1834.

230. R. M. Beverley, “The heresy of a human priesthood, traced in letters on the present state of the visible church of Christ”, 2nd edn. Lond. 1839.

231. R. M. Beverley: two tracts bound together in B. M. L. 908.c.3 (9) & (10): {250} “A dialogue concerning unity”, London (n. d.); “An inquiry into the scriptural doctrine of Christian ministry”, London (n. d.). The former is the tract referred to in the text, while an appendix to the latter quotes from a newspaper of February 1841.

{continued on next page}

importance in connection with “The Inquirer” is that since Beverley’s “Letters” were hardly sound Brethren propaganda, recommendation of them in the journal in July 1838 shows that it was then far from being an undercover Brethren periodical.

The August 1838 issue of “The Inquirer” records the expulsion from ministry among the Quakers of W. D. Crewdson, while according to the next issue his wife was baptised at Kendal on 15/9/38 by Isaac Crewdson of Manchester, “after which most of those assembled partook together of the Lord’s Supper”. The September issue also records the baptism at Tottenham Baptist Chapel of W. D. Crewdson’s son Edward. Other matters recorded in this issue are the baptism of James Braithwaite at Kendal on 9/9/38 and the secession from the Quakers of five members of the Jowitt family at Leeds “on the ground of the reception of the ordinances”; two other Jowitts also resigned their membership. The October issue lists the numerical decline of Quaker meetings in Suffolk, and the December issue {136} gives similar statistics for Bristol, Taunton and Kendal, all places where Brethren meetings are known to have existed shortly afterwards. The December issue also states that Isaac Crewdson and a Mr. Boulton are organising seceded Friends at Manchester into a distinct church body, meeting in Grosvenor Street Chapel, Charlton-upon-Medlock. After further mention of this church in February 1839, however, the notices of baptisms and of other personal matters relating to seceded Quakers abruptly cease, though there are subsequent articles of general Christian interest, including in June 1839 extracts from their “reasons for secession” published by Leonard Strong of British Guiana and a curate named Jeckell of Wymondham in Norfolk. Jeckell’s subsequent ecclesiastical history has not been traced, though four years later an Independent minister in the same town seceded to join the Brethren²³², but Strong became a prominent member of the Open Brethren at Torquay after his return to England in 1848.²³³ From about mid-1839 “The Inquirer” becomes progressively more wordy, and this seems to mark its closer association with the Brethren. There is a significant article in February 1839 entitled “The pursuit of wealth and worldly distinction unlawful to the Christian”; this was a theme characteristic of both Quakers and early Brethren. An editorial in July 1839, and an article submitted by an anonymous Plymouth Brother in October 1839, criticise a hostile article in the “Eclectic Review” for May 1839, about the Brethren. The leading article in January 1840, “The Blood of the Lamb and the Union of Saints”, was a reprint of an anonymous

On the development of Beverley’s thinking towards Brethren principles, cf. also his “The Church of England examined with respect to Scripture and tradition”, 2nd edn. considerably enlarged, London 1844. This was originally written in reply to anti-Brethren lectures by the Rector of Hereford in 1842 published as: John Venn, “The Christian ministry and church membership; according to scripture and the Church of England. With a more especial reference to the views of certain Christians generally known as the Plymouth Brethren.” Pt. 1, London 1842.

232. Obadiah Atkins, in May 1843: John Browne, “History of Congregationalism in Norfolk and Suffolk”, 1877, p. 293.
233. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 22–3. Strong’s personal history was very similar to that of many Brethren founders: born in 1797 the son of a Herefordshire Rector, he first served in the Navy, but after being converted went to Magdalene Hall Oxford in 1823, was ordained, served a curacy at Ross-on-Wye and then went to St. Matthew’s Demerara in 1826. Most of his converts were negroes, and not surprisingly the opposition to his evangelical preaching came from white planters. He organised communities for worship after his secession along Brethren lines; it is not clear how he came into contact with the movement in Britain, but there were links with Bristol by 1840, for Müller’s “Narrative” mentions donations to the Orphan Homes in that year from “negro brethren at Demerara”. cf. J. S. Reynolds, *op. cit.* note 19, p. 96.

tract (by Tregelles) well-known among the Brethren in the mid-1830s.²³⁴ In February 1840 Darby wrote an article {137} entitled “Lay Preaching”, the same issue included a discussion of the “New York Correspondence”, and Tregelles apparently contributed several more major articles during the year.²³⁵ It does seem therefore that by 1840 the journal was being used fairly consciously to propagate Brethren views. The last issue was in December 1840.

It is not surprising that many of the Quaker seceders at this time eventually found their way into the Plymouth Brethren, for they shared evangelical doctrine, pietistic and informal ways of worship, and a quietist outlook on society. Both groups were pacifist, both eschewed “worldly distinctions” – title and rank within the church as well as outside it – and both abhorred the church involving itself in secular associations of any kind. As regards worship, the obvious similarity lay in the charismatic ideal of waiting for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, without either chosen individual or written liturgy to guide proceedings; a small difference here was that among the Brethren, women were not allowed to participate audibly in public worship. It may be significant that there were several discussions of this matter in the pages of “The Inquirer”. Both Quakers and Brethren suspected formality and symbolism in worship, but the Quakers went further in rejecting even the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In the case of the latter, however, the Zwinglian commemorative view held by the Brethren was clearly the easiest for erstwhile Quakers to accept, especially as it was linked with the impulsive Spirit-led worship already entirely familiar to them.

Brethren annals date the origins of the meetings at Kendal and at Bowness-in-Windermere in 1836, and an early list of members at the latter {138} is probably still in existence. There were members of the Crewdson and Braithwaite families in these meetings. Darby and Müller both visited Kendal to preach, and Müller spent a month at Bowness in autumn 1847; this visit probably strongly influenced the alignment of the Westmorland assemblies with the Open Brethren after 1848.²³⁶ On 30/3/51 the morning attendances at Kendal and Bowness were 100 and 34 respectively, the Kendal meeting being in a public Lecture Room in Whitehall where the Brethren had met since about 1839, and the Bowness one in a small chapel seating 100 which had been open for only a month.²³⁷ These meetings do not appear as Plymouth Brethren in the 1853 Census Report, but a meeting at Ulverston with attendance 32 is listed. The Census Return for the Open Brethren meeting at Wellington in Somerset, which had met since 1841 in its own Millway Meeting House and had a morning attendance of 60 on 30/3/51, was signed by William Thomas Clark, Deacon; of the Quaker meetings around Wellington the Return from Milverton was signed by a George Clark. Although it is not possible to name individuals in the Brethren meeting at Wellington who were formerly Quakers, the circum-

234. The tract was anonymous and undated; Tregelles acknowledged his authorship in “Three Letters”, Plymouth 1849, Letter I. The original tract is in B. M. L. 908.c.4 (5), pub. London 1835?

235. The article “The Blood of the Lamb and the Union of Saints” is signed F. The same ascription appears after the following articles during 1840: “On the restoration of the nation of Israel” (February & March); “Community of Goods” (May); “The Man of Sin” (June); some other articles during 1840 are signed “g”: “The blood of Jesus Christ, its {251} uses and applications” (March), and in four parts “The death of Jesus Christ” (June, August, September and October). It seems possible that all these were by Tregelles.

236. D. J. Beattie, *op. cit.* note 15, pp. 186–191; George Müller “Narrative”; Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 82 (November 1843).

237. H. O. 129/26/575.

stantial evidence linking its origins with the Quaker secessions seems to be strong. By 1851 Quaker membership at Wellington must have suffered considerable decline, for the morning attendances on 30/3/51 at the three meetings at High Street Wellington, Milverton and Culmstock were only 24, 6 and 15 respectively.²³⁸ Regarding Suffolk, there is no positive evidence linking the Quaker decline mentioned in the “Inquirer” with the origins of Brethren meetings, though there may be a connection. An isolated group of Brethren meetings did spring up, however, around {139} Stowmarket between 1841 and 1843. Brethren reminiscences appear to suggest that these meetings originated as a result of itinerant evangelistic preaching in an area which previously had little representation of Calvinistic dissent.²³⁹ By 1851 there were Open Brethren meetings in several places, and on 30/3/51 there were 110 morning attenders at Woolpit, 45 and 35 at two meetings in Stowmarket, 22 at Tostock, and 110 for an afternoon “gospel meeting” at Combs. The meeting-houses at Woolpit and Stowmarket had been erected in 1841 and 1843 respectively, which may suggest slightly earlier origins for the communities using them; the other Stowmarket meeting was held in the Provident Society Room, that at Combs in the School, and the one at Tostock in a converted barn attached to a cottage.²⁴⁰ Suffolk was soon to become the strongest area of rural Brethrenism after Devonshire.

One important early centre of the Brethren about whose origins no evidence whatsoever has yet come to light, was at Stafford. There were very few Brethren meetings in the Midlands in the 1830s and 1840s, but the one at Stafford was in existence by 1839, apparently using its own chapel erected in that year. In early 1839 Darby spent some time there.²⁴¹ By 1851 it appears that there were two rival meetings, roughly equal in numbers, the Exclusive in “The Room” with 45 morning attenders on 30/3/51 and the Open with 40, the latter figure apparently referring to the following Sunday. The two Returns are dated respectively 31/3/51 and 7/4/51; they are signed by different people and the appended comments are different, but since both meetings were apparently in St. Mary’s Parish and neither gives its exact location, it is just possible that {140} both Returns refer to the same meeting and two were completed in error. If there were two meetings, their respective affiliations are betrayed by the comments under “Religious denomination”: (a) “Christian”. No connection with any denomination, sect, party, or leader: nor any sympathy with dissent or its principles: but holding Christ as the Head of the Church, and the Holy Ghost as Sole Ruler in the Body. (b) Christian Brethren commonly called Plymouth Brethren. (a) echoes Darby’s language about the church, particularly in the use of the word “Body”, while Exclusives would never have used the title “Plymouth Brethren”.²⁴²

Most of the Brethren meetings in Yorkshire and Lancashire became Exclusive in 1848, two notable ones which did not being at Liverpool and Hull. In both of these cases there was a strong local leadership not subservient to Darby. The 1851 Census Return for the Liverpool meeting, in a room off Canning Street, was signed by William Collingwood. Born in 1819 and educated at Oxford, Collingwood became a successful artist and settled at Liverpool in 1839 as a teacher of drawing; at first he attended St. Jude’s Chapel where

238. H. O. 129/12/314.

239. D. J. Beattie, *op. cit.* note 15, pp. 122–6.

240. H. O. 129/8/217.

241. See Darby’s letters from Stafford: 31/1/39 (Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 37) & 26/2/39 (to Rev. James Kelly, in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Eccl. Vol. III* pp. 267ff.). cf. *Newton Memoirs* p. 252.

242. H. O. 129/15/367. However Henry Groves, writing in 1866, implies that the whole Stafford meeting followed Darby: *op. cit.* note 214, p. 47.

ministered the famous evangelical Rev. Hugh M’Neile, but he joined the Brethren in 1844. Later in the century he was a prominent Open Brother, and he did not die until 1903.²⁴³ That the Liverpool meeting was operating by early 1844 is also confirmed by the fact that a letter to Darby dated 17/5/44 mentions it²⁴⁴; there were 80 in attendance on the morning of 30/3/51, and Collingwood remarked: “The Christians using this Room are not an organised Body, but meet solely on the common ground of believing in the Lord Jesus – and therefore there are no formally-appointed ‘officers’.”²⁴⁵

{141} The meeting at Hull, which through geographical isolation and lack of previous personal connections with Bristol did not become aligned with the Open community but drifted away from Brethren altogether after 1848, had originated in the secession of Andrew Jukes, the curate of St. John’s Church, whose Rector Rev. Thomas Dikes was a well-known moderate evangelical. Jukes attended Trinity College Cambridge, winning the Hulsean Prize in 1840 for an essay on “Principles of Prophetic Interpretation”, and was ordained deacon in York Cathedral on 12th June 1842 at the age of 26. His doubts over the practice of infant baptism were strengthened in September 1842 when he officiated at a baptism in which since there were no sponsors for the child, the parents persuaded a complete stranger present in church to act in this capacity. On 20th November Jukes preached in St. John’s a sermon on John 17 verse 22 suggesting that unity in spirit and heart, though not necessarily in ecclesiastical organisation, should characterise true Christians, and that differences over non-essentials should not be allowed to obscure their real unity in Christ. This sermon was rapidly published, and Jukes’ apparent implication that the “non-essentials” included episcopacy led to his suspension by the Archbishop in May 1843, after his answers to written questions about the nature of the ministry and the efficacy of non-episcopal communion had failed to satisfy the Archbishop’s Chaplain. On 31st August 1843 Rev. C. Daniell baptised Jukes in George Street Baptist Chapel in Hull²⁴⁶, and Jukes established his own congregation in the Wilberforce Room in St. John’s Street. In 1844 the meeting was transferred to the New Room in Baker Street which Jukes had built largely at his own expense; this was later {142} known as Baker Street Chapel. Darby visited Hull to see Jukes in November 1843²⁴⁷, and as a result his congregation became associated with the Brethren; it was referred to as a Brethren meeting in Willans’ letter to Darby of 17/5/44. Darby’s influence seems apparent in the content of Jukes’ public letter dated 15/12/43 and published in early 1844, stating the reasons for his leaving the Church of England. These included dislike of clerical subscription, indiscriminate infant baptism, and the idea of a “national church”, and the letter closed with a prayer for the Christians of Hull “that the Lord may deliver you from union with evil, and from supporting what He is so soon about to judge”. Jukes’ call to Christians to separate from ecclesiastical error was similar to Hargrove’s at Westport in 1836, when Darby had also been involved. Jukes also published the text of a letter to Rev. E. Bickersteth dated 8/8/45, which ran through four editions that year, about the prophetic interpretation of the Book of Revelation. This suggested that the “mystic Babylon” represented not only

243. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 96–8; W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, footnote p. 23.

244. Letter from John Willans at Skipton to Darby, 17/5/44; original in Sibthorpe Collection.

245. H. O. 129/20/461.

246. Rev. John O’Dell, “A century’s story of the Baptist Church, George Street”, 2nd edition Hull 1904, p. 24.

247. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 80 (letter from Kendal, November 1843: Darby states his intention of crossing the country to Hull.)

the Roman Catholic Church – as many evangelicals believed – but also the system of national Christianity in England. This letter closed with the quotation of Revelation 18 verse 4, and a call for separation in words identical with those of his earlier public letter.

Jukes' meeting enjoyed considerable numerical support, and the estimated attendances on 30/3/51 were 150 in the morning and 300 in the evening. By this time the congregation was in no sense a Brethren one, since Jukes signed himself as "minister" and described the denomination as "Independent", although the "Remarks" stated that it was not connected with the Congregational body.²⁴⁸ The absence of strong personal {143} links between members at Hull and the Brethren community at large, coupled with Jukes' ownership of the building and the fact that the majority of his congregation presumably valued his services as pastor more than the rigid application of Brethren principles of worship, complete the explanation of why the severance of the Brethren connection does not appear to have resulted in a schism. There is no record of another Brethren meeting in Hull earlier than the small Open Brethren meeting in Dock Street in 1864.²⁴⁹ At Baker Street Chapel until its abandonment in 1866 Jukes practised believers' baptism, although his congregation was never formally associated with the Baptist denomination. Compilers of Hull Directories seem to have been in considerable doubt over how to describe him, and there are various titles given between 1842 and 1863 of which the most amusingly inconsistent appears in Stephenson's Directory for 1848, where he is described as Rev. Andrew John Jukes B. A. (Plymouth Brethren).²⁵⁰

The origins of the Yorkshire meetings which became Exclusive in 1848 may be traced with certainty, though there is little surviving documentary evidence, to a large secession in 1841–1842 from the Methodist New Connexion, which was strongest in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Co. Durham. At the annual MNC Conference at Halifax at the end of May 1841, two ministers were expelled – Joseph Barker of Newcastle, aged 35, and William Trotter of Bradford, aged 23. The main reason was the vigorous campaign they had been waging within the Connexion, largely by tracts, in favour of the principle of "living by

248. Religious Census Return, H. O. 129/24/520.

249. J. J. Sheahan, "... History ... of ... Hull", 1864, p. 438.

250. Hull Advertiser, Friday 2/6/43 on Jukes' suspension.

A. J. Jukes, "Glory and Unity: or the privilege and duty of the church of Christ; a sermon preached at St. John's Hull on 20th November 1842", Hull 1842; ——— "The way which some call heresy, or, reasons for separation from the established church: A letter to the Christians of Hull", Hull 1844; ——— "The way which some call heresy: a letter to the clergy and laity of the Church of England, on clerical subscription" 2nd edn., with preface dated 14/5/62 (this is an amended version of the 1844 letter, and the preface gives important new information about {252} the details of Jukes' secession); ——— "Letter to Rev. E. Bickersteth", 4th edition, Hull 1845.

Two anonymous undated tracts (in Hull Central Library L.001.JUK) are probably by Jukes, and from their contents clearly date from his period among the Brethren: "Some explanation of the Brethren in Christ who meet for worship", and "A letter on the church of the Scriptures". The former advocates a wide basis of communion fellowship, while the latter echoes Darby's doctrine of the "ruin of the church".

Jukes' subsequent viewpoint may be judged from his "'Mercy and not sacrifice', or Christ's ways our pattern. A letter to brethren in the Lord", Hull 1855. This also advocates a wide basis of fellowship.

H. H. Jeaffreson, "Letters of Andrew Jukes", 1903, especially the preface, though this plays down Jukes' connection with the Brethren and is inaccurate in details about this period.

Rev. J. King, "Memoir of ... Rev. Thomas Dykes", 1849, pp. 206–7.

See also various Directories of Hull.

faith” and against the accumulation of wealth even in the MNC Beneficent Fund for retired ministers and their widows.²⁵¹ Barker’s views on these matters had been strongly {144} influenced by reading Brethren tracts, probably including those by Groves and Hall; he also objected to “human creeds and formularies”, desiring that the Bible should be the only doctrinal standard, rejected the practice of infant baptism, and was an ardent pacifist and advocate of non-resistance. Barker was especially well-known as a preacher within the MNC, and the expulsion of the two caused the estrangement from the MNC Conference between its annual meetings of 1841 and 1842, of 29 chapels and 4348 members, about one-fifth of the total membership of the Connexion. Almost all the members of the Bradford and Newcastle circuits seceded, Bradford asking Trotter to remain as pastor, and several hundred seceded at Gateshead, Leeds, Stalybridge and other places. The extent of the disaffection seems to indicate disapproval of the Conference’s treatment of Barker rather than response to a positive apologetic position, and this conclusion is supported by Barker’s subsequent slide through Quakerism and Unitarianism to complete scepticism. Shortly after the 1841 Conference the two friends published jointly a tract whose radical spirit approached that of the Brethren, although the need for evangelical orthodoxy was not stressed:

“... We do not intend to form a new *sect*. We believe that there are far too many sects already, and we should not wish to add another to their number. We are persuaded that the true church of Christ is one; and however the faithful members of that church may be distinguished from each other by differences of sentiment on minor matters, there is no need for them to form separate, distinct denominations ... While those who are now connected with existing communities retain their membership, we would have {145} them ... lay the foundation for a future union of all the faithful, on the principles of the New Testament ... There are thousands scattered through this land, who wish to return to true Christian simplicity; who wish to have no creed or code of laws but the gospel of Jesus Christ ...”²⁵²

The incipient parallel with Brethren ideals is obvious in the appeal for “New Testament unity and simplicity”, but while the last clause sounds superficially like the Brethren rejection of “formal religion”, it could also conceal a pure doctrinal radicalism, and it rapidly became apparent that Barker and Trotter would be going separate ways. By September

251. e. g. (1) Joseph Barker, “The duty of Christian churches to provide for their poor members, and the impropriety of professing Christians connecting themselves with benefit societies, Rechabite societies, life insurances, loan funds, or with any societies founded on worldly principles”, 1840; (2) William Trotter, “The more excellent way, or the religion of principle and the religion of feeling compared” (sermon preached in Salem Chapel, Halifax, 24/5/40); (3) William Trotter, “A lecture on the use of money” (sermon preached in Ebenezer Chapel, Bradford, 10/1/41) pub. 1841; (4) Thomas Smith, “The rule for the Christians”, n. d.; (5) “The wealth question”, n. d. and anon., pub. at York; (6) Abraham Scott, “Common sense in the business of life not all at once to be totally discarded” (anti-Barkerite); to which Trotter replied with (7) “The foolishness of God wiser than the wisdom of men”, Newcastle 1841. At the end of this last tract Trotter gives a clear statement of his views about the Christian attitude to money and property which echo those of Groves’ tract “Christian Devotedness”. Barker also took issue with the MNC Annual Committee over his desire to found a new Bookroom which they blocked, presumably because they {253} supposed he would use it to propagate his own views. This controversy is not mentioned in this study because it is not relevant to the particular question of incipient Brethren principles in the M. N. C.

252. “A brief report of the proceedings of the Conference of the Methodist New Connexion, in the case of Joseph Barker and William Trotter: together with advice to their friends, and a reply to the Conference Address”, by Joseph Barker and William Trotter; extract p. 27 & p. 30.

1841 Trotter was evidently concerned about Barker's unorthodox tendencies, probably especially his extreme insistence on the right of private judgement in doctrinal matters, which had already attracted the charge of Quakerism. Trotter published on his own account a long polemic tract about his expulsion which stated that it should be known his case was distinct from Barker's, and in particular that no question of doctrinal error had been involved as it had partly been in Barker's case.²⁵³

Barker's views travelled rapidly in a Quaker direction, and his ecclesiastical course diverged quickly from Trotter's. By the end of 1842, although the MNC commenced lawsuits to recover the use of the estranged chapels, Barker had organised several dozen congregational churches called "Christian Brethren Chapels" especially in the Potteries, around Stalybridge and Bradford, and in Co. Durham. By 1845 he was almost a Unitarian and his ministry had been repudiated by many of those who had left the MNC with him. From 1846 he became increasingly involved in politics in support of the Chartist movement, and finally in 1851 [146] emigrated to the USA where he died in 1875. The Christian Brethren Chapels mostly amalgamated eventually with other Unitarian churches; among those which may have been included erroneously as Plymouth Brethren in the Summary Tables of the 1853 Census Report were the Barkerite meetings at Chorlton (Lancs), Ashton-under-Lyne, Bingley, Cleckheaton and Little Horton. The Returns can usually be distinguished by the continued use among the Barkerites of the terms "local preacher" and "minister", though these were not always employed.²⁵⁴

Few of the four thousand seceders returned to the MNC and it seems that some of the more evangelical of them – though certainly only a small minority of the whole – particularly in Yorkshire where Trotter was well-known as a preacher, joined him in establishing communities for worship which soon became associated with the Brethren. That the numbers were small by comparison with those who followed Barker is confirmed by the fact that there is no record of actual MNC chapel buildings being appropriated by the Brethren. It does not seem that Darby can have had much to do with these at the start, as he was out of England from autumn 1841 to July 1843, and even on his tour of the north at the end of 1843 his only intended visit in Yorkshire was to Hull²⁵⁵. By early 1844, how

253. William Trotter, "The justice and forbearance of the Methodist New Connexion, as illustrated in the case of William Trotter", 1841. The sarcastic title of this tract sets the tone for a polemic of 45,000 words which throughout is concerned to score points; in spite of Neatby's praise of Trotter (op. cit. note 36, p. 148), one cannot help comparing Trotter's polemic effort of only eight years later: see text p. 147 and note 261.

From August 1841 to September 1842 Barker published at Newcastle a fortnightly periodical entitled "The Christian Investigator and Evangelical Reformer" (later in two bound volumes, London & Newcastle 1842 & 1843). It is clear from reports in this that Trotter and Smith (see text p. 147) continued to preach in the estranged MNC Chapels at least until autumn 1842, though a letter from Smith in the very last issue closes significantly by stating that he cannot agree with all the doctrines propounded in the "Investigator". There was a strong Barkerite group in Sheffield (Vol. I p. 318 et al.) and at Pudsey (Vol. II pp. 27–8) where Smith lived (ibid. p. 60); this may help to explain the presence of Brethren meetings in these places in 1851 (see text pp. 146–7). The first explicit connection with the Brethren is shown by some long quotations from Müller's "Narrative" of 1837, in the "Investigator" in March 1842: Vol. II, pp. 116–123.

254. John Barker (ed.), "The Life of Joseph Barker", 1880, pp. 254ff.

Religious Census Returns, H. O. 129/20/471 (Chorlton), -20/474 (Ashton), -22/494 (Bingley), -22/499 (Cleckheaton and Little Horton).

255. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 80. It is of course possible that after this letter was written (from Kendal in November 1843) an unexpected turn of events involved Darby in Brethren beginnings elsewhere in

ever, there were Brethren meetings at least at Sheffield, Hull (where Jukes was living), Scarborough (where R. M. Beverley was living), Otley (where Trotter was living), and Skipton (where Willans was living), all these meetings being mentioned (with Liverpool and Kendal) in the letter written by Willans to Darby on 17/5/44. It seems very likely also that some of the 235 seceders from the MNC at Leeds between 1841 and 1843²⁵⁶ {147} subsequently formed the nucleus of the Brethren assembly there, though again no positive evidence has survived; Willans moved to Leeds where he soon became the leading member of the meeting, and it seems that he remained one of Darby's chief informants about affairs in the north.²⁵⁷ On 30/3/51 the estimated morning attendances at the Sheffield, Leeds, Pudsey, and Cononley (Skipton) Exclusive meetings were respectively 50, 150, 30 and 20, while there were 70 attenders that evening at the Otley Exclusive meeting.²⁵⁸ Trotter lived at Otley until 1850 when he moved to York; a leading Plymouth Brother here was Thomas Smith, a former ally of Trotter's in the MNC. Trotter and Smith collaborated during March and April 1851 in giving eight public lectures on prophetic subjects in the Merchant's Hall, Fossgate, which strongly advocated the premillennial advent and Darby's views on the rapture of the saints.²⁵⁹ On 30/3/51 there were 80 attenders at the morning meeting of Exclusive Brethren in the Little Stonegate Room, York, while 150 attended in the evening at the Merchants' Hall. The meeting at Little Stonegate had been commenced in March 1849.²⁶⁰ Trotter took a leading part in the execution of Darby's "Bethesda discipline" after 1848, though he had not been present at Plymouth during the strife there, and his account of the schism in a letter to Thomas Grundy dated 15th July 1849 was subsequently printed and became the "official" Exclusive version; as such it is still reprinted among Exclusive Brethren.²⁶¹ He later moved to Scarborough, where he died on 5th November 1865 at the early age of 47.²⁶²

The accounts of the secessions of the 1830s and 1840s from the established church, the Quakers and the Methodist New Connexion show {148} clearly that to a large extent the Plymouth Brethren movement grew by absorbing disaffected Christians from other denominations. This absorption of the discontented carried with it considerable dangers, and some of the radical experimenters who were briefly associated with, or at least well-

Yorkshire; {254} but when he writes he speaks only of his intention to visit Hull, and is apparently unaware of other Brethren meetings in Yorkshire.

256. The statistics of the MNC secessions on pp. 144 & 146 are taken from the "State of the Connexion" reports in the Minutes of the MNC Annual Conferences, for 1841–3.
257. Other original letters from Willans to Darby in the Sibthorpe Collection are dated 12/6/44 (from Liverpool), 31/8/44 (from Skipton), and 10/11/51 (from Leeds).
258. Religious Census Returns, H. O. 129/23/508, -23/501, -22/499, -22/489, -22/493.
259. Directories of Yorkshire.
"Eight lectures on prophecy, delivered in the Merchants' Hall, York, during March and April 1851", by William Trotter & Thomas Smith, 1851.
260. Religious Census Return, H. O. 129/23/515.
261. Originally "Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda"; later reprinted as "The origin of (so called) Open-Brethrenism. A letter by W. Trotter giving the whole case of Plymouth & Bethesda". Trotter states in this that he "became acquainted with the brethren between six and seven years ago". As he was writing in July 1849, this places his first contact between July 1842 and July 1843, which fits in well with the other evidence available.
262. Information provided by City Librarian, York; cf. Letters of J. N. D., Vol. I p. 503 (letter from Dublin 1865); H. Pickering (ed.), op. cit. note 21, pp. 31–2; W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, p. 148.

known to, the Brethren community, subsequently passed over into various forms of unorthodoxy or even complete scepticism. Douglas, Hardman, A. J. Scott of Woolwich and other early associates who became Irvingites afford one example, while the Christian Brethren Chapels of Joseph Barker must have seemed to an ill-informed observer to be superficially akin to the meetings of the Brethren, even though he himself was never associated with the movement. Another strange fellow-traveller was H. J. Prince, theological student at St. David's College Lampeter from March 1836, then from July 1840 curate of Charlinch, near Bridgwater, Somerset. From November 1841 his preaching began to arouse emotional effects reminiscent of Wesley's early days, and he soon had one hundred converts. The Bishop revoked his licence in May 1842, and it seems that he then visited various places to preach including Weymouth. In early 1843 he began making exaggerated claims to the personal inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which grew wilder as time passed.²⁶³ All this, of course, was not at first so far from the Brethren's claim to possess the impulsive guidance of the Holy Spirit in their worship and preaching. It is not clear whether Prince actually joined for a time the Brethren meeting at Weymouth, but it seems possible, since in 1845 not only a local Vicar, but also J. G. Deck, the leading member of the Weymouth Brethren assembly, and Prince's brother-in-law A. A. Rees of Sunderland (not a Plymouth Brother but a great friend of Müller's and sympathetic to the movement) wrote tracts against him.²⁶⁴ [149] All three writers make it clear that they had previously esteemed Prince as a fellow-evangelical; when such men left the ministry, Brethren eager for recruits perhaps found it difficult to anticipate where their radicalism might lead. Records of such doubtful allies have naturally not survived in Brethren annals, but their existence may partially justify some of the criticism the movement received. The Brethren's interest in prophetic interpretation must also have invited comparisons with groups like the Southcottians. Unjust as such criticism undoubtedly was, even in Darby's Letters there are references in 1833 to Gnostic tendencies in an Irish Brother²⁶⁵ and in

263. The development of Prince's views may be traced from his numerous tracts, beginning with an extreme but doctrinally orthodox evangelicalism, and passing through a stage of ascetic mysticism to a visionary fanaticism:

H. J. Prince, "Letters addressed ... to his Christian Brethren at St. David's College Lampeter", 2nd edn. Llandovery 1841; ——— "The Charlinch Revival", London 1842; ——— "Strength in Jesus", Pt. I Bath 1842, Pt. II London 1844; "On fasting", London 1843; of his later tracts the most important is ——— "'The Little Book Open'. The Testimony of Br. Prince concerning what Jesus Christ has done by his Spirit to redeem the Earth. In voices from heaven." 7 pt. London 1856–9.

264. [255] Rev. Octavius Piers, "The Door not shut. Or, three reasons for not believing Mr. Prince to be a true prophet. By Rev. Octavius Piers, Vicar of Preston, Dorset. Affectionately addressed to those of his parishioners and others, who still follow that gentleman." London 1846. (Preston is a small village just east of Weymouth).

J. G. Deck, "A word of warning to all who love the Lord Jesus. 2nd edn., with additions. The heresy of Mr. Prince; with extracts from his letters"; London & Weymouth, 1845.

A. A. Rees, "The Rise and Progress of the heresy of ... J. H. Prince", Weymouth 1846 (preface signed Sunderland January 1846).

Unlike some Brethren, Deck was never a prolific pamphleteer, and it seems most unlikely that he would have ventured into print unless at the very least some of the Brethren at Weymouth were in danger of associating themselves with Prince. It is also interesting, and may be significant, that by 1844 (see Preface to "Strength in Jesus" Pt. II) Prince had established himself as minister of Adullam Chapel, Brighton, for there was probably a Brethren meeting in Brighton soon after: see note 209.

265. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 22 (April 1833).

1845 to French “sisters” having “dreams about the coming of Jesus”.²⁶⁶ In addition, it is only fair to say that while the Plymouth Brethren movement as a whole remained true to Calvinist orthodoxy, at its fringes there were occasional tendencies towards a highly speculative theology which drew severe comment from Tregelles.²⁶⁷

(d) *Areas of expansion – overseas*

A detailed study of the development of the Brethren movement overseas is outside the scope of this dissertation – in any case it would refer mainly to the period after 1848 – but for the sake of completeness, and in order to illustrate their general place in the early history of the movement, the work of Groves in India and of Darby on the Continent must be briefly described. Groves’ missionary efforts at Bagdad had been apparently a total failure, though there was one indubitable convert²⁶⁸, but his work in India, while it was marred by quarrels with Anglican ecclesiastical authorities, was much more promising. Groves left Bagdad {150} in May 1833 and arrived in Bombay in July. After nearly a year in India he sailed to England in order to gather recruits and finance, and when he returned from Milford Haven in spring 1836 he took with him, among others, William Bowden and George Beer and their wives, members of Chapman’s congregation at Barnstaple, who spent many years working as Brethren missionaries in India. Soon after Groves’ arrival at Madras in July, he was joined by Parnell and Cronin who had travelled from Bagdad. At this time some stir was caused by Groves’ part in the secession from the Church of England of a CMS missionary named Rhenius, who had gathered ten thousand native converts through evangelistic preaching at Tinnevelly in south India. The nearest Bishop was at Calcutta, and as there was an urgent need for native helpers, Rhenius asked permission in 1831 to ordain them himself. When this was refused he suggested that to expedite matters either the Bishop should ordain them, but on the Bible and without specifically Anglican subscriptions, or that they should be ordained by the German Lutheran and Reformed missionaries who were co-operating with CMS in Tinnevelly, or that they should be allowed to baptise and administer the sacraments without ordination. All these suggestions were refused, and it was at the point when Rhenius was intending to visit England to confer with the Home Committee of the CMS, that Groves’ advice to him to stay at his post and continue with his work regardless, led to the withdrawal of CMS support for the Tinnevelly Mission. During his visit to England Groves published a tract about the circumstances of the Mission with the intention of gathering funds for its continued support from among the Brethren community in Britain.²⁶⁹ After Rhenius’ early death {151} in 1838 most of the seceded Tinnevelly converts returned to the communion of the

266. *ibid.* pp. 93–4 (March 1845).

267. S.P. Tregelles, “Three Letters to the author of ‘A Retrospect of events that have taken place amongst the Brethren’”, London 1849; Letter III, “The sufferings of Our Lord – the application of the Psalms to Christ ...” Quoted, with comment, by W.B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 142–3.

268. W.B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 68.

269. A.N. Groves, “A brief account of the present circumstances of the Tinnevelly Mission”, Sidmouth 1835; reprinted with additions Lond. 1836.

Church of England, but a number of Brethren assemblies were established in India, largely through the work of an Indian friend of Groves' named Aroolappen.²⁷⁰

Darby's work on the Continent commenced in September 1837. In a letter dated 10th August to Westport (where during a recent visit he had been greatly encouraged by the growth of the church) he implied that he was on the point of leaving England.²⁷¹ On 29th August he travelled by coach to Basle²⁷², and finally arrived at Geneva, where he joined the "Eglise du Bourg-de-Four", an independent evangelical congregation which had originated in the visit to Geneva in 1817 of Robert Haldane and Henry Drummond. One of the three "frères-pasteurs" of this congregation, Emile Guers, had visited England in July and August 1837 to collect funds for the building of a new chapel; it is possible that Darby's visit to Geneva was connected with this, and that he stayed with Guers in Geneva.²⁷³ Darby was welcomed by the church and his early ministry was greatly appreciated, especially as it helped to pacify the recent agitation in the church for radical reform along the lines of congregational democracy. Darby returned to England in summer 1838, corresponding while away with J. Foulquier, a leading member of the congregation, and during his absence the church transferred to the new chapel which was opened at La Pélisserie in March 1839. On his return to Switzerland in autumn 1839 Darby spent less time at Geneva, but preached at Neuchâtel and other places in Vaud Canton until at the end of March 1840 he went to Lausanne at the invitation of an influential member of the Free Church (otherwise known as the {152} church of "l'Ancienne Dissidence"). There was considerable domestic strife in this congregation through the arrival as pastor in autumn 1839 of H. Olivier, who had recently embraced the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection, although he continued to believe in absolute predestination. There were two groups of seceders from the Free Church at Lausanne, one rejecting both doctrines and one accepting both, leaving Olivier with only a minority of followers. In this situation Darby's preaching gained immediate and startling success: "Darby had only to open his arms to receive all who were detaching themselves from Mr. O., and found himself soon surrounded by a mass of dissenters, who saw in him the saviour of the congregation in danger."²⁷⁴ A similar split over the doctrine of perfection was occurring in the Free Church congregation at Vevey, and it is probable that Darby gathered a group of disciples there, although the careful recollection of a founder-member in 1883 dated the origin of the

270. "Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves", 2nd edn. 1857, Chs. IX & XIV; W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, Ch. IV. Groves felt that much Christian missionary work was hampered by the refusal of European missionaries to come down to the level of the natives in their manner of living: see A. N. Groves "On the nature of Christian Influence", Bombay 1833. Like his first tract "Christian Devotedness" this is extremely verbose, but shows clearly Groves' unworldliness. Even the sympathetic Neatby, however, implies that he was idealistic to the point of impracticability.

271. {256} Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III pp. 490–2 (letter from Plymouth).

272. The stagecoach ticket is in the Sibthorpe Collection.

273. "Le premier réveil et la première église indépendante à Genève", Geneva 1871, anon. but ascribed to Emile Guers; pp. 68, 80ff., 330ff.

274. The origins of the Brethren at Lausanne are described in detail in J. J. Herzog, "Les frères de Plymouth et John Darby, leur doctrine et leur histoire, en particulier dans le Canton de Vaud", Lausanne 1845. (This tract is in the B. M. L., 4650.b.13). Other sources for Brethren origins in Switzerland include J. Cart, "Histoire du mouvement religieux et ecclésiastique dans le Canton de Vaud", Part III, Lausanne 1879, pp. 237–399; H. de Goltz, "Genève réligieuse au dix-neuvième siècle ..." Geneva & Basle 1862, pp. 437–455; Oswald Genouy, "Le darbyisme: étude historique et critique", Geneva thesis, 1884. Also much incidental information from Letters of J. N. D. and Coll. Writ. of J. N. D.

Brethren meeting at Vevey during Darby's first stay in Switzerland, in spring 1838.²⁷⁵ Darby's final triumph at Lausanne was in spring 1841 when Olivier abandoned his Wesleyan doctrines and amalgamated his congregation with Darby's. During 1840 Darby also gave eleven lectures on prophecy at Geneva which were immediately published and were very popular among the evangelical community. Darby was away in England again from March to August 1841 and from July 1843 to February 1844, otherwise basing his activities on Lausanne, where he established an informal Bible School at his house for the instruction of his young disciples. From the autumn of 1841 it appears that Darby began to stress in his teaching the particular ecclesiastical principles of the Brethren; at first he had acquiesced and {153} joined in the ordinary arrangements of the Free Church, but now "the regular ministry found itself abolished, and the boundaries which had up to then surrounded the dissenting bodies were broken". Darby proceeded to establish, by suppressing every form of organisation, free assemblies "qui n'eussent que lui pour centre".²⁷⁶ As these tendencies developed a number of the more conservative members of the Free Church at Lausanne broke away from Darby under the leadership of Francis Olivier, the brother of Henry, but by 1843 most of the former Free Church members, at least at Lausanne and Vevey, were organised into Brethren communities. In Geneva the Brethren assembly was formed on 3rd March 1842 by the secession of about sixty members of the "Eglise de la Pélasserie" which Darby had continued to visit frequently.²⁷⁷

At this point in the narrative it is worth breaking off to explain the relevance of this early development in Switzerland to the subsequent history of the Brethren movement as a whole. In the British Isles it would be true to say that there were a number of reasonably independent "founders" of the Brethren, and enough has been said to show that in its early years the community was fairly heterogeneous, springing from various origins and with various ideals. On the Continent, however, the sole apostle of the new order was Darby, and the Brethren community exhibited from the first a much more monolithic orthodoxy. Here, too, Darby had an unrivalled opportunity to apply fully his ideals about the organisation of the church, whereas in England the insights of other leaders were also operative. Study of the principles on which the early Swiss assemblies were built casts a flood of light upon Darby's actions in the 1848 schism {154} in Britain. In particular, the stress in his French tracts on the church as "One Body" explains the fundamental assumption behind the "Bethesda Circular" of August 1848.

The expansion of Brethrenism in Switzerland was materially assisted by the publication of a monthly Darbyite periodical at Lausanne from summer 1844 entitled "Témoignage des disciples de la Parole", and by wars of tracts in 1843 and 1844 between Darby and two Free Church ministers, Francis Olivier and Auguste Rochat. Between 1845 and 1850 Darby wrote and published at Lausanne and Geneva a large number of tracts dealing with the nature of the church, attacking in particular the ideas of an ordained ministry and a recognised eldership, and the common distinction between the "visible" and "invisible" church implied in the existence of national and local churches.²⁷⁸ These

275. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, footnote p. 76.

276. J. J. Herzog, op. cit. note 274, Chapter III.

277. Emile Guers, op. cit. note 273, pp. 335–341.

278. J. J. Herzog, loc. cit. note 276, lists some of Darby's tracts which had already appeared by mid-1845: "Sur la formation des églises"; "Quelques développements nouveaux sur les principes émis dans la brochure 'Sur la formation des églises'"; "La liberté de prêcher Jésus, possédée par tout Chrétien"; "La promesse du Seigneur" (on Matthew 18 v. 20) etc.

tracts give the earliest definitive picture of the views which in England later received their fullest ecclesiastical expression in Exclusive Brethrenism: the old organisational unity of the church being “in ruins”, all true Christians ought as a matter of urgent duty to separate themselves from their respective “schismatic bodies” and associate themselves together, apart from all “human systems”, as a visible expression of the One Body. Darby never claimed that his meetings were exclusively the One Body, but they “expressed” it in a way which no other Christian church could.²⁷⁹ Typically, one of his Swiss tracts characterises as schismatic all groups other than the Brethren.²⁸⁰

In March and April 1844 Darby spent some weeks preaching in the Ardèche in southern France, where a number of Brethren assemblies started. Everywhere he and his disciples from Lausanne went almost exclusively to {155} those already converted: “Darby himself avows that he seeks a double end in the conversion of sinners and the reunion of believers under the banner of the Plymouth Brethren: but it is quite natural and almost of necessity that in practice the latter end lives more in view than the former, which sometimes even disappears entirely.”²⁸¹ It is interesting to learn that Darby baptised infants in the course of his ministry among the French and Swiss assemblies, though he preferred the local Brethren to exercise this function themselves.²⁸² When a Jesuit-fomented anti-Protestant revolt broke out in Vaud Canton in February 1845, Darby felt that his continued presence would be a danger and a hindrance to the Brethren congregations, and he left for England immediately, not returning to the Continent for two years. From spring 1847 to summer 1850 he spent only relatively short periods of time in England, in autumn 1847, summer 1848 and summer 1849, otherwise spending most of his time among the assemblies in southern France; the actual execution of his “Bethesda discipline” in Britain was carried through almost entirely by his followers.²⁸³ The French and Swiss meetings had very little contact with the Brethren community in Britain apart from Darby, and they heard the account of the Plymouth and Bethesda controversies only from his lips and pen, so that after 1848 they were effectively Exclusive meetings, though practical problems of intercommunion did not arise, and no assemblies were expelled as happened in England. The origins of the Open Brethren congregations in French-speaking Switzerland are to be found rather later in the century.²⁸⁴

279. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 87ff. & cf. p. 200.

280. “Le schisme”.

281. J. J. Herzog, *op. cit.* note 274, p. 52.

282. *ibid.* p. 53.

283. Darby’s movements may be partially reconstructed from the dates and places of writing of many of his published letters.

284. Paul Perret, “Coup d’oeil sur l’Histoire et les Principes des frères appelés ‘Frères Larges’”, n. d. (but recent) pamphlet issued by the Institut Emmaüs, an Open Brethren Bible School at Lausanne.

Chapter IV.

The causes of the 1848 schism.

The story of the 1848 schism is one of a personal and largely local dispute between two Brethren leaders of strong personality, which developed into a much more fundamental division throughout the Brethren community, ostensibly over doctrine and discipline but in reality over an ecclesiastical issue – centralisation or congregational autonomy. The Brethren community in Britain, which by the middle 1840s numbered perhaps six thousand²⁸⁵, had sprung from very heterogeneous origins. There was universal superficial similarity in the charismatic form of worship and the absence of formal organisation and official ministry, but the distinctive ideals held in common were mostly negative ones such as the recoil from secular associations and “sectarian systems”.²⁸⁶ The varied origins of the meetings and their scattered distribution also meant that although there was some cross-fertilisation of ideas through regional conferences, circulation of tracts and itinerant preaching, the development of a particular community depended to a large extent upon the energy and insights of its local leaders, and where these insights differed domestic tensions were inevitably produced. Since there was no official platform for the discussion of opposing views, and no representative body with the right to deliberate and decide issues, these tensions could be resolved only by the independent action of leading individuals, and this was the case in the controversies of 1845 and 1848.

{157} The most crucial differences of outlook among the Brethren were concerned with church order – the degree of “liberty of ministry” (that is, worship conducted along impulsive lines) allowed, and the question of independency or federation of the assemblies with its consequent effect upon the administration of communion discipline. The quarrel between Newton and Darby in 1845 was largely about the former, while that between Müller and Darby in 1848 was largely about the latter. Contributory factors were differences of opinion in prophetic exegesis, especially between Newton and Darby, and over the degree of openness of communion practised in the meetings of the Brethren. This last difference was the least articulate, but excellent illustration of it is afforded by Groves’

285. {257} This figure is an estimate based on the assumption, explained in the text, that the morning attendances at Brethren meetings give a guide to the committed membership. According to Summary Table A of the Religious Census Report, 1853, the total attendances at the three services of the 132 Plymouth Brethren congregations on 30/3/51 were 5613 (morning), 4441 (afternoon), 7272 (evening). Bearing in mind that errors in both directions probably combined to give a reasonably accurate total of meetings, and also that the Census did not cover Ireland, the figure of six thousand may very roughly represent the total morning attendance in Britain on the day of the Census. It would be difficult to establish a more accurate total without consulting every individual Return in the whole Census. Of this number, probably a thousand were around Plymouth, approaching the same number both in London and around Bristol, a few hundreds in the northern counties and in Ireland, and smaller concentrations elsewhere.

286. The word “sectarian” could carry two senses: critics of the Brethren, and their own more liberal adherents (such as Groves), used it mainly in the emotive sense of “narrow in fellowship”, but the majority of the Brethren in the strictly theological sense of having a basis of communion other than that of the “One Body”. After 1848 the Exclusives continued to claim strongly that they were not sectarian in the latter sense, although they obviously were in the former. This underlying difference of emphasis needs to be borne in mind when reading the writings of early members of the Brethren movement.

letter to Darby of March 1836 which pleaded for the retention of a more catholic fellowship than was emerging.

Müller and Darby were in complete agreement about the importance of the principle of “liberty of ministry” in worship, which allowed any person who felt himself led by the Spirit to participate audibly, but Newton was gradually adopting a different course at Plymouth. The Ebrington Street meeting was rather unique from several points of view. It was the largest and best-known in Britain, partly because Plymouth had given its name to the Brethren movement, partly because the community’s publishing activities had been centred there, partly because Newton and Tregelles were among the most scholarly and intellectual adherents of the Brethren. As time went on Newton assumed more and more autocratic control over the Plymouth meeting, exercising this by several means: he persuaded it to abandon the practice of a week-night “care” meeting which Darby {158} considered a safeguard of democracy; he exercised increasing theological censorship (via its Editor Harris) of “The Christian Witness”, this being most obvious in the last two issues, which advocated Newton’s views in favour of a stated ministry and a recognised eldership in the local church as against Darby’s rejection of them; he promoted an assiduous distribution of tracts combating Darbyite exegesis, especially of prophecy; and what was worst of all to most Brethren because of the principle of charismatic worship, he introduced a certain amount of practical restriction on who was allowed to preach and minister in the Plymouth meeting. It seems very likely that Newton’s movements in this direction were influenced by his desire to exercise a general anti-Darbyite theological censorship in the church, because he felt that Darby’s prophetic teaching had undesirable pastoral consequences. In 1849 this conclusion was drawn by a well-informed and critical observer.²⁸⁷ When the whole controversy was over, Tregelles wrote a clear account of the matters at issue relating to liberty of ministry, from the Plymouth point of view. One of his strongest points was that as late as 1844, when extreme “democratic” views of unrestrained ministry were being propounded in London, Wigram published a tract in which he stated that Brethren supported a “stated but not an exclusive” ministry. Wigram meant by this that in any assembly those who were gifted by God “to speak to edification” would be both limited in number and known to the rest, but that this situation would not be allowed to hinder the exercise of a real gift by any other person.²⁸⁸ In spite of Tregelles’ defence of Newton, it does seem that at Plymouth there was a degree of practical hindrance of those whose doctrine was unwelcome, and of younger {159} and less well-educated members of the congregation who attempted to participate in the leading of public worship. Some of the Brethren began to feel that the liberty of the Spirit was being restricted by the practical reappearance of a clerical order, with prepared sermons and a planned alternation of ministry between Harris and Newton. Darby made periodic visits to Plymouth in the early 1840s and “saw clericalism creeping in”. He objected in particular to people going to the front to speak during the breaking-of-bread service at Ebrington Street, and insisted on speaking himself from his place in the congregation, although Newton claimed with some justice that the poor acoustics of the Chapel made the former practice necessary. Darby also complained that it was always those recognised as teachers who broke the bread and poured out the wine, though he admitted something was done to amend this.²⁸⁹ These

287. “A Retrospect of events that have taken place amongst the Brethren”, London 1849, pp. 5–6.

288. S. P. Tregelles, *op. cit.* note 267, Letter I.

289. J. N. Darby, “Narrative of the facts, connected with the separation of the writer from the congregation meeting in Ebrington Street”; in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D., Eccl. Vol. IV*, pp. 29, 32, 34 et al.

apparently petty objections involved a real principle, for Darby did not wish a shy or unlearned person who was nevertheless genuinely led by the Spirit, to be hindered from taking part audibly in the leading of worship by announcing a hymn, reading the scriptures or leading in prayer. On this matter Darby and Müller stood solidly together, and “liberty of ministry” thus interpreted has always remained the really distinctive practice of all sections of the Brethren. Newton was the movement’s only major casualty over this matter, and he carried with him only a few Plymouth friends, who were in any case more attached to him personally as a valued spiritual guide than to his particular church principles.

A far more fundamental division among Brethren arose over the matter of relations between the growing number of meetings, with its implications {160} for the administration of intercommunion. The Brethren had begun without defining anything, least of all the limits of their own fellowship, but it was inevitable that as the movement developed there was increasing concern about its doctrinal and organisational boundaries. Those who founded the Brethren in the 1830s had launched the movement with a sense of liberation, a willingness to experiment, and on the whole without rigid preconceptions of what the result would be. In the 1840s, however, an increasing proportion of those who became Brethren were joining existing communities with established practices and with clearly-defined limits of belief. With the period of experimentation over, the movement’s self-consciousness rapidly increased, and it was at this point that it began to divide into those for whom distinctiveness of commitment and association was paramount – the Exclusives – and those who wished to retain the principle of congregational autonomy as a sufficient organisational basis. This division was not fully articulate until after 1848, although it was foreshadowed in the gradual estrangement between Groves and Darby.

The tendency towards centralisation in the sections of the Brethren movement where Darby’s influence was strong appeared early. That the meetings were increasingly looking to him as their founder had been noticed by Groves in 1836, but formal centralisation became an explicit issue in a letter written by Wigram to Darby on 6th October 1838 in which he asked Darby’s opinion of the suggestion that with the increase of meetings in London there should be one central gathering to which all the others should be subordinate. Significantly, the motive for such a plan was to make possible the administration of a comprehensive communion {161} discipline:

“There is a matter exercising the minds of some of us at this present time in which you may be (and in some sense certainly are) concerned. The question I refer to is, *How are meetings for communion of saints in these parts to be regulated?* Would it be for the glory of the Lord and the increase of testimony to have *one central meeting*, the common responsibility of all within reach, *and as many meetings subordinate to it*, as grace might vouchsafe – or to hold it to be better to allow *the meetings to grow up as they may without connection and dependent upon the energy of individuals only?* ... I do indeed long to find myself more distinctly associated with those who as brethren will feel and bear their measure of responsibility, but this is all I can say; for truly, provided there be in London some place where the wanderer can find rest and communion, my desire is met; though the glory of the Lord will, of course, be still to be cared for.”²⁹⁰

290. Wigram’s letter is reprinted in H. Groves, op. cit. note 214, p. 11. Some or all of the italics may very well be Groves’.

The problem of church government was bound to arise when Brethren meetings became numerous, and Wigram's letter suggests two possible attitudes to the matter. One of them was that the government of the local church, and in particular the question of reception to communion, should be entirely the responsibility of those acknowledged as local leaders, and the other was that some form of metropolitan organisation should be established. Darby's reply to Wigram's letter has not survived, but the latter course was ultimately taken in Exclusivism in spite of the nominal retention of local autonomy. The beginnings of the development of the Saturday metropolitan meeting of Exclusives in London may perhaps be traced to this {162} initial move towards a federation of the London meetings of the Brethren. To Darby and the Exclusives the principle of "independency" asserted by the Open Brethren after 1848 was confusion. It meant that the decision whether or not to admit an individual to communion was left entirely to the elders of the assembly to which he applied, and this implied the risk – apparently contrary to the ideal of the church as "One Body" – that a doubtful case might be rejected at one meeting but admitted at the next.

In matters of prophetic exegesis the first division was between pre- and post-millennialists, or more simply between pessimists and optimists. The Brethren were pessimists, and by 1850 so were almost all British evangelicals; the millennial kingdom would not be inaugurated by the efforts of men, but by the intervention of Christ. The next division was threefold, and related to the prophecies of events in both Old and New Testaments. The *preterist* view suggested that they had in fact all taken place in the early centuries, though unnoticed; the *historicist* view was that they had been taking place in symbolic ways throughout history, so that they were partly fulfilled and partly future; and the *futurist* view, which gained almost complete acceptance among British evangelicals in the early years of the nineteenth century, was that the great majority of the biblical prophecies were still unfulfilled. Evangelicals were not alone at this time in adopting a futurist interpretation of biblical prophecy. The historicist view gave most opportunity for the equation of the Pope with Antichrist, and in the sixteenth century the Jesuits had countered the historicism of the Reformers with the preterist and futurist views. The Tractarians adopted futurism as a means of weakening the view that the {163} Papacy was the symbolic fulfilment of the prophecies of Antichrist, claiming that these fulfilments were still in the future.²⁹¹ Another interesting parallel is that in one of the later "Tracts for the Times", just as in Brethrenism and Irvingism, the possible imminence of Christ's return is presented as an urgent moral incentive.²⁹²

Within premillennialist futurism, disputes arose over the order of events to be expected. One of the greatest problems was that in different New Testament verses the return of Christ is spoken of as on the one hand unseen and unexpected "like a thief in the night" and on the other as intensely visible – "for as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." At the Powerscourt Conferences a solution to the problem was suggested – that there would be two comings of Christ, the first a secret one, when the "saints" on earth at the time would be suddenly and quietly removed to "meet the Lord in the air" – this being the occurrence referred to in verses such as "two shall be grinding at the mill; one shall be taken and the other left" – and the second a return of Christ with the glorified saints in splen-

291. {258} LeRoy Edwin Froom, op. cit. note 68, Vol. III p. 663; cf. J. H. Newman, "Essays Critical and Historical", Vol. II 1840, pp. 112–185, "The Protestant idea of Antichrist".

292. Tract 83, "Advent Sermons on Antichrist".

dour and majesty, to commence the Last Judgement and to inaugurate the millennial kingdom. Darby, followed by the majority of the Brethren, became a strong advocate of this teaching, with its great emphasis on the need for the Christian to live in readiness for an immediate and unexpected translation to heaven. Here the quarrel between Newton and Darby found a second crisis-point; for if there is to be a secret and unexpected coming, Christians will have no warning of it and are to walk as men with girded loins and virgins with trimmed lamps, while {164} if there is no “secret coming” they will have ample warning of the approach of “the day of the Lord”: “Now learn a parable of the fig-tree ... so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.” Darby felt that by his rejection of the doctrine of the “any-moment” coming of Christ to “rapture the saints”, Newton was removing the moral challenge from Christianity. Newton replied that Darby did violence to scripture by his doctrine, for special pleading was necessary to explain away those verses which seemed to imply a visible sequence of events before Christ’s return – wars, rumours of wars, signs in heaven and other portents. One particular problem with pastoral implications was whether the church on earth would have to pass through the “great tribulation” of Matthew 24 verse 21, for Darby said that the saints would already have been removed to heaven by the rapture, while Newton thought it imperative to warn Christians to prepare themselves for the coming tribulation, which might soon occur.²⁹³

Had the matter ended here the two leaders might have agreed to differ but the quarrel had important consequences for the whole manner of the exegesis of scripture, through Darby’s claim that the problems might be solved by assigning certain verses which had previously been applied to the Christian church – notably those referring to visible portents of Christ’s return – to a righteous Jewish remnant on earth after the rapture of the saints, who would not be members of the Christian church and who would be living again by Law. This suggestion was said to have been made by Darby in a letter from Cork about 1833; Newton recalled that his later comment to Darby was “if you admit that distinction you virtually give {165} up Christianity.”²⁹⁴ Newton was acute enough to see that once accepted, such a manner of biblical exegesis could be applied much more widely than in the case of a few obscure prophetic verses, and his suspicions were correct, for Darby shortly began to assign large sections of the Sermon on the Mount and other moral passages of the New Testament to the postulated Jewish remnant who had to live again by law. Directly from this strain in Darby’s teaching there arose a widespread “dispensationalism” among fundamentalist evangelicals far outside Brethren circles, typified later in the Scofield Bible, which assigned different parts of scripture to the different eras or “dispensations” under which God deals with men in different ways – our age being the dispensation of grace or the church dispensation. The Brethren, especially as represented by Darby, became the source of this teaching which spread far beyond their own confines, especially in North America, and on this subject they exerted an influence out of all proportion to their numbers.²⁹⁵ Another ultimate consequence of Darby’s teaching on the

293. The main New Testament passages relevant to this problem are Matthew Chapters 24 and 25, and 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5.

294. Newton Memoirs p. 238.

295. LeRoy Edwin Fromm, *op. cit.* note 68, Vol. IV, footnote p. 1223.

C. K. Bass, “Backgrounds to dispensationalism”, Grand Rapids Michigan 1960.

The doctrinal difference between Newton and Darby is discussed in W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 104–6.

subordinate place of the moral law in the Christian dispensation was the violent criticism of the Brethren later in the century on the grounds of antinomianism. Newton characterised Darby's treatment of scripture as "grasshopper exegesis", and Müller had strong reservations about it, although he was a premillennialist and would have agreed with Darby against Newton on the matter of the "any-moment" return of Christ. The Brethren at Bristol, however, were very much on the fringe of the dispute over prophetic interpretation, being greatly preoccupied with evangelism, the local pastoral ministry, and social work.

The first stage of the crisis within the Brethren movement was a {166} direct clash in 1845 between Newton and Darby, precipitated by the latter, and leading to the formation of a rival meeting in Plymouth and the virtual rejection of Newton's original congregation by the Brethren at large. If this clash had been merely a personal quarrel between two imperious leaders – which to a certain extent is what it was – it might be passed over quickly. However not only did it involve doctrinal and ecclesiological issues, but the details of the dispute cast most interesting light upon the structure of the Brethren community. The Brethren had tried to sweep away the accumulated errors and traditions of eighteen centuries, and in doing so they had rejected every semblance of human organisation and authority. Yet their principal architect Darby remained at heart a high churchman, with an immense conviction of the spiritual authority residing in the church guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit, even if the outward forms of appointment and office had vanished. This paradox resulted in a cleavage between those who were prepared to sacrifice an authoritative church in order to realise a genuinely catholic fellowship (the Open Brethren), and those who resolved the dilemma by accepting the effective personal domination of Darby himself. There is a straight line from Darby's effect on F. W. Newman in 1827, through Groves' comment in 1836 that the infant meetings were looking to him as founder rather than to Christ as Head, to Herzog's 1845 description of Darby's Swiss meetings "qui n'eussent que lui pour centre", to W. H. Dorman's bitter quotation of Gibbon in 1866 after his secession from the Exclusives, with reference to Darby: "the Roman Caesars surrounded their throne with clouds and darkness, humbly professing themselves the accountable ministers of the Senate, {167} whose decrees they at the same time dictated and obeyed."²⁹⁶ In the absence of any formal authority, Darby's weapon became the threat of withdrawing his personal blessing and acceptance from an individual or a meeting, and the immense esteem in which he was held among Exclusives ensured that his lead was followed. The clash at Plymouth in 1845 affords the first instance of Darby's use of this course of action. It also demonstrated the incapacity of the Brethren community to deal with a domestic emergency. When their first great crisis came, they found themselves completely unprepared to deal with it. They had no constitution of any kind, no historic tradition to which they could appeal, no higher church authority to which disputes might be referred. "... They left their communities to fight their battles on no acknowledged basis and with no defined court of appeal. If once the sense of fair play (one would be ashamed to speak of spirituality) broke down, there was no check on the most arbitrary temper. The Brethren were never weary of denouncing "system", but they made haste to demonstrate that the worst system can hardly be so bad as no system at all."²⁹⁷

296. W. H. D[orman], "The close of twenty-eight years' association with J. N. D.", 1866. This is a most important tract: in Cambridge U. L. 8.25.42 (2).

297. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 121.

The personal antipathy between Newton and Darby had a very long history; their differences over prophetic matters, especially the doctrine of the return of Christ, became apparent while Newton was still at Oxford. Newton recalled this in summer 1841 in a letter written to Darby who was visiting Plymouth²⁹⁸:

“Your strong expressions of condemnation (which have occurred from time to time during the last ten years frequently) have always been connected with a particular subject – and on that subject {168} I believe you to have departed from the truth. The first occasion on which I expressed a judgement different from yourself was in my own rooms at Oxford in a little reading meeting, and I well remember the character of our interview the next morning – from that time to the present it has only been when I have been silent on the subject in question that I have escaped the severe expression of your condemnation.”

In 1831 Newton was only 23, and Darby’s seniority over him by seven years must have seemed relatively more important; Newton’s recollection implies that Darby had treated him like a precocious young disciple. In 1845 the situation was far different, for each man was the acknowledged spiritual guide of a large Christian community. The conflict of views at the 1832 Powerscourt Conference, mentioned both by Daly’s biographer and by Darby in his letters²⁹⁹, almost certainly involved the same matter, and the strife at Plymouth in 1832 and 1833 over the “any-moment” coming aroused such feelings that Wigram moved to London to avoid it. Newton’s rival prophetic meetings of September 1834 annoyed Darby, and it is probable that Newton did not attend any further Brethren prophetic conferences, leaving Darby a clear field for the propagation of his views. Meanwhile the strongest advocate of the “any-moment” coming at Plymouth was Hall, and his removal to Hereford in 1837 allowed Newton’s views more undisputed sway at Plymouth. Darby later stated that Newton “got rid of” Hall, the implication being that this was because of his unwelcome prophetic views.³⁰⁰ After 1837 Darby was mostly on the Continent and rarely at Plymouth even when home, but in 1839 he came down from Stafford where he had been staying, to attend a Brethren conference at Exeter, and there accused {169} Newton of controlling “The Christian Witness” to suit his own views.³⁰¹

Darby’s “Jewish exegesis” of scripture, first mentioned in his letter from Cork about 1833 and applied widely by him in teaching and publication thereafter – even in “The Christian Witness” in 1836 – finally convinced Newton that he could remain silent no longer, and in 1840 he wrote and circulated widely in manuscript copies “Five Letters on prophetic and dispensational subjects” which attacked Darby’s views. In the summer of 1841 Darby was in England again, and during a visit to Plymouth he had an exchange of letters with Newton on the subject of the “Five Letters”.³⁰² It seems that Newton had

298. Original in Sibthorpe Collection; see text p. 169 & note 302.

299. Mrs H. Madden, loc. cit. note 169; Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 19 (letter dated by Editor 1833, but cf. note 132).

300. J. N. Darby, op. cit. note 289, p. 22; but cf. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, p. 108.

301. Newton Memoirs p. 252.

302. (cf. note 298). The letters, two from Darby and one in reply from Newton, are undated and unstamped and were clearly exchanged by hand when both men were in Plymouth. Newton’s reply states that the letter is being written “a few months” after he began to circulate the “Five Letters”; Darby was out of the country from autumn 1839 to March 1841, so this must be summer 1841. The original letters from

been annoyed by Darby's public expressions of disapproval, and Darby wrote to give an explanation of his views and to suggest that Newton should stop distributing the Letters. Newton's reply to him, after mentioning their first disagreement at Oxford, continued:

“For the last ten years I have been for the most part entirely silent, until within a few months – and for your sake and the sake of the church I would still have continued to be so, if I did not consider the error that has crept into the prophetic and dispensational teaching of very many, to be most fatal. The words that I used to Harris five years ago, when first I read in the “Witness” that the prophetic instructions in Matt. 24 are to be regarded as belonging to “persons ignorant of a resurrection Saviour”, were, that it was a principle that would destroy Christianity if carried out. It has been carried out by many much further.”

Newton had by this time reached the conclusion that their differences were irreconcilable, for during this visit of Darby's he had said “do not let us for the future converse on prophetic and dispensational subjects”; {170} and in his letter to Darby he summarises the situation thus:

“The great hindrance to any approximation of judgement appears to me to be this: that we have severally adopted as axioms two principles which are entirely counterparts one of another. – I believe that it is essential to the existence of prophecy about the church that there should be intervening events foretold. You on the contrary say there can be no intervening events for the church's expectation and refuse to receive any thought from Scripture inconsistent with this main principle.”

The most important pastoral consequence of these differences was that Newton continued to apply the Ten Commandments and the moral injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount as a basis for practical Christian living, while Darby and his followers laid extreme stress on the doctrine that the Christian, being under grace and not under Law, finds his moral incentive primarily in the possibility that Christ might return at any moment and find him unprepared for his translation to heaven. In the realm of systematic theology there is no doubt that Darby was the innovator, and a characteristic system of teaching, which Newton opposed for the rest of his life in many tracts and writings, grew up around his suggestion that the New Testament should be rightly divided among the different dispensations and the verses applied to the correct era. Among the early results of this teaching were the doctrines that the church in its “heavenly standing” was formed by St. Paul and that therefore neither the Old Testament saints nor those converted at the first Pentecost are part of the church; that after the rapture of the church at Christ's secret coming the Jewish believers of the next dispensation will not be {171} members of the Christian church, but will be under a dispensation of Law; and that much of the moral teaching and prophetic instruction of the New Testament is intended for this Jewish dispensation and is therefore not applicable to the Christian church. It does not seem that these ideas gained much support in the Brethren circles represented by Bristol and Barnstaple, and the coherent system of Darbyite dispensationalism found its ecclesiastical home after 1848 among the Exclusive Brethren.

No further clash over prophecy took place during Darby's next visit to Plymouth in 1843, although he was now becoming concerned about the incipient “clericalism” in the

Darby, with a copy of Newton's reply, are in the Fry Collection. The quotations on pp. 167–8 and 168–9 of the text are from this reply by Newton.

meeting. During the next two years Darby exchanged letters with various Brethren at Plymouth, notably Harris, in which he criticised practices there; an important letter [to Harris?] giving his viewpoint at the end of 1844 suggests that the meeting at Plymouth has ceased to be a witness to Christian union and now represents a rigid doctrinal opinion:

“If a strange Christian or a brother from another place were to go there, the consequence would be, not that he would find the testimony of the power of love in union and the truth delighted in and sought out, but that he would be instantly subjected to a process of imbruing (sic) his mind with certain views ...”³⁰³

Darby’s charges against Newton seem on this point to be justified. Newton never made a secret of the fact that he thought Darbyite prophetic doctrine to be pastorally destructive and that he therefore opposed it in every way:

“The reason why I cannot welcome some brethren AS I would others is that I have seen for many years a very peculiar system of doctrine {172} prevailing among the brethren which, unless counteracted, will assuredly bring in the worst of all sectarianism amongst us – I mean sectarianism of doctrine ... (there follows a summary of dispensational teaching) ... These and other such doctrines ... have produced a peculiar system ... not containing merely added truths to those which the saints of God have heretofore held, but subversive of them: and it is this system which I feel bound in conscience to oppose in every legitimate way ... I desire to produce in the minds of the dear brethren everywhere, the same strong sense that pervades my own, of the evil of this system – and this is one object of my labour everywhere. At the same time, my hostility is against a system, not against individuals.”³⁰⁴

In early 1845 a further fuse was added to the explosive situation by the publication of Darby’s lengthy reply (two hundred thousand words) to Newton’s “Thoughts on the Apocalypse” (first edition 1843) which brought into further prominence the doctrinal dispute between the two men. Amid this mass of polemic writing it is difficult to retain perspective; but a key to the root of the differences is supplied by the preface to Darby’s main reply, where he charges Newton with setting aside “the proper standing, position, and blessing of the church of God”.³⁰⁵ The great significance of this statement cannot be appreciated without glancing for a moment ahead. Later commentators upon the Brethren movement almost unanimously remarked that Darby always remained at heart a high churchman and parallels were often drawn later in the century between the Exclusive Brethren and the high church movement.³⁰⁶ At this early stage, one manifestation of Darby’s exalted doctrine of the church was his insistence {173} that it stood in a special and higher relationship to God than either the Old Testament saints or the future Jewish elect in the next dispensation, while Newton insisted that the faithful from Abraham onwards were an integral part of the church.³⁰⁷ It is also a fair comment on the Brethren movement after 1848 to say that in general the oecumenical and evangelistic elements found their way into the Open section, while the men more interested in biblical exposition and

303. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III pp. 492–5.

304. Printed letter Newton to Clulow, 18/4/45; Fry Collection, 1845 Folio 5.

305. Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Prophetic Vol. III.

306. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, pp. 194 & 199ff.

307. cf. *ibid.* p. 106.

“church truth” mostly became Exclusives. The latter, then, were the “high church” Brethren, and the doctrinal clash of 1845 between Newton and Darby sheds a great deal of light on the subsequent development of Exclusivism.

Darby arrived in Plymouth, fresh from Switzerland, about 20th March 1845, and without paying social calls on Newton or his co-workers in the ministry, arranged Bible Reading meetings, probably with the assistance of Richard Hill with whom he stayed. At these meetings, and also in many private conversations, he severely criticised Newton. On 30th March Newton, somewhat concerned, wrote to his co-workers Harris, Soltau and Batten, asking for their support against Darby:

“I now call upon you to act with resolution and decision in the case of Mr. Darby. I do not ask you to act ungraciously. I do not wish you to discredit his gifts, but I do intreat you to express openly and unequivocally your united disapproval of the course that he has thought fit to pursue ... I believe an apostle would scarcely seek to be a kind of universal *censor* in the way Mr. Darby does – and certainly nothing can exceed (and here I know I can appeal to your own experience) the overbearing manner both in speech and action in which he seeks to occupy this {174} censorial position.”³⁰⁸

Harris and Batten duly spoke to Darby, and he disavowed any antagonistic intent. On receiving their report, Newton wrote a pacific note to Darby, which led to a further exchange of three letters each way. In the course of this correspondence Darby charged Newton with unchristian conduct: “you have acted very badly towards many beloved brethren and in the sight of God” (letter 2, Darby to Newton), and with sectarianism – not so much a closed or narrow communion but a rigid system of doctrine: “what I object to is the systematic effort to form a sect and the discrediting and denouncing those who do not adopt the opinions which form its base” (letter 6, Darby to Newton).³⁰⁹ Since Darby’s last accusation seemed to Newton to implicate his fellow-workers, he laid the “Seven Letters” before them, and a meeting of fifteen brethren including Newton and Darby was held to discuss the charges, probably on Monday 14th April. At this meeting it seems that Newton lost his self-control and in anger stated that he wished to make Plymouth a centre of opposition to Darby’s system of doctrine and thus control at least the western counties. A fellow-worker of Newton’s named Clulow was not present, and in reply to his request for a written account of the meeting, Newton wrote him a letter dated 18th April stating that Darby had charged him with sectarianism, and giving the “substance” of his reply, though omitting the comment about the western counties.

After a preaching tour in Somerset in May during which he found further evidence of the prevalence of “Plymouth views”, and another visit to Plymouth, Darby spent the rest of the summer in Jersey. Meanwhile Harris, whose views on the disputed matters were diverging from Newton’s, {175} remarried and left Plymouth at the end of July. On 8th October he wrote informing Newton that he had taken the painful decision not to return to minister among the Brethren there, and characterising this as the most important step in his Christian life since he had left the Church of England in 1832. Newton’s reply shows that this was not unexpected:

308. Copy of this letter in Fry Collection, 1845 Folio 2.

309. {259} All seven original letters are extant, the four from Newton in the Sibthorpe Collection and the three from Darby in the Fry Collection; they are undated and unstamped and were obviously exchanged by hand while both men were in Plymouth.

“Your note has caused me sorrow but it has scarcely caused me surprise. I could not but be conscious that ever since March there has been a gradual and increasing distance growing up between us. To this end Satan has, I doubt not, long been directing his efforts, and now has succeeded. The chief instrument in this has been Mr. Darby ...”³¹⁰

However Harris’ conversation with Tregelles in London on 19th October, on the eve of the latter’s departure for Italy to engage in textual studies, shows that his reasons for leaving Plymouth were not that he agreed with Darby against Newton but that he did not wish to take sides with either.³¹¹

Darby arrived back in England on 18th October, and at the end of the morning meeting on his first Sunday at Plymouth, 26th October, he detained the assembly and announced that he was leaving because “God is displaced”. This was a clear reference to Newton’s discouraging of unrestrained ministry and democratic church government. Darby felt, not without considerable justification, that the charismatic principle in both church order and worship was being contravened by Newton’s *de facto* adoption of a ministerial position. Nevertheless Darby’s responsibility for forcing the issue is clear, for he went straight to Plymouth on his return to England, uninvited by the leaders of the meeting and with no ties of home or family to draw him there. To his mind the fundamental ideals of the {176} Brethren movement were at stake, and the conflict was both inevitable, and in one sense desirable, if these ideals were to survive. On 10th November Harris returned briefly to Plymouth, and at a public meeting on 14th November explained his reasons for ceasing to minister; a further meeting was called for Monday 17th November to give Darby an opportunity of stating publicly his reasons for leaving. Although (according to Darby) Newton and his friends used various means to stop their congregation attending, two or three hundred attended this meeting at Ebrington Street, and at it Darby made his first public charges against Newton’s personal integrity, incidentally without first communicating them to him.

The two principal charges were that Newton’s account of the meeting of 14th April in his letter to Clulow (which had since been published locally with an appendix listing sixteen points Newton wished to maintain against Darby’s dispensational doctrine) was false, and that Newton was guilty of dishonesty over some amendments to a tract of his which in fact, Darby claimed, reversed the force of the argument of the original. This had been written some years earlier and circulated in manuscript copies, but Newton published it in summer 1845 with certain amendments, the preface acknowledging this. In it he had been dealing with his views on the authority of teachers in the church, and this was now a bitterly-disputed question, Darby having rejected the idea of a recognised eldership and disliking Newton’s attempted restriction of the ministry at Plymouth. Darby now accused Newton of attempting to evade the charge by dishonestly seeking to establish that some years previously he had written against the doctrines he was now accused of holding. The nature of these charges {177} clearly indicates the degree to which the strife at Plymouth was the result of a personal quarrel; Darby seems to have been incapable of dissociating his disapproval of Newton’s doctrine from his personal antipathy to him. No other explanation can account for the unrelenting vehemence of his attacks upon his former friend,

310. Original letter from Harris, with a copy of Newton’s reply, in Fry Collection, 1845 Folio 6. Harris’ second wife was a daughter of Legh Richmond, the well-known evangelical Rector of Turvey until 1827; H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, p. 19.

311. S. P. Tregelles, *op. cit.* note 138, p.

sustained for the rest of his life and inherited by the whole of Exclusivism. A profound scandal arose throughout the Brethren movement in 1845 as a result of these charges, and in the ensuing warfare Darby made increasing use of the hypothesis that Newton and his friends were directly motivated by Satan.³¹² This habit developed until the real perspectives of the situation were almost completely obscured by the incredible confusion in Darbyite tracts between doctrinal error and moral obliquity. In 1849 an extremely well-informed observer commented about the Plymouth dispute:

“A species of Satanology almost as absurd as a belief in witches, has been introduced among the Brethren, and that with such serious and earnest credulity, that a person in their communion who should openly venture to express a disbelief in this direct diabolical agency, would run great hazard of being himself treated as an ‘agent of Satan’.”³¹³

The same writer quoted sarcastically – the italics are his – a typical published comment of Darby’s about Newton and his friends at Plymouth:

“I don’t know one who has embraced systematically this system, that has not fallen into open and systematic untruth; some of them persons, I gladly add, as incapable of it *as any of us* as to their habits as men. But if Satan be using them in the flesh, what can be expected?”³¹⁴

Not all anti-Newtonian Brethren approved of Darby’s free use of the {178} “Satan” hypothesis to justify his actions at Plymouth, and at the Bath conference in May 1848, which will be described later, W. B. Dyer, another former associate of Newton’s in the ministry at Plymouth, said with reference to Darby’s explanations that he objected to “the devil being made the pack-horse”.³¹⁵

The way in which this dispute was carried on gives a remarkable illustration of the unworldly atmosphere prevailing among the Brethren, for it never seems to have occurred to Newton to prefer charges against Darby for slander. There seems little doubt that such an action would have been quickly successful, and the Brethren movement might have been spared much subsequent bitterness. However, such a course of action did not commend itself to Newton, who felt that disputes between believers should not be settled by recourse to a secular Court.³¹⁶ Having heard of the dispute at Plymouth, leading Brethren from various places travelled there to investigate, mostly invited by one or other of the disputants. A very haphazard and inconclusive enquiry took place in the first fortnight of December, largely by means of private interviews. No formal conclusion was reached, but of the ten leading Brethren principally involved, Congleton and Rhind (the latter also on behalf of Rickards, Moseley and Morris) wrote to Newton exculpating him³¹⁷, while on the other hand at least three of the ten, Wigram, McAdam and Sir Alexander Campbell, later

312. e.g. the opening of Darby’s “Narrative of the facts” (op. cit. note 289): “... Convinced as I am that it is a work of Satan which has developed itself here ...” cf. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, p. 123.

313. “A retrospect of events”, London 1849, p. 10.

314. *ibid.* p. 11, quoting J. N. Darby, “Summary of the meetings in London, February 1847”, in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Eccl. Vol. IV* p. 273.

315. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, p. 147, quoting an eye-witness account.

316. *ibid.* p. 155.

317. Letters extant in the Fry Collection.

became passionate partisans of Darby. However as a result Soltau signed a note on 17th December informing the Ebrington Street church that in his judgement and that of Batten, Dyer and Clulow, the charges against Newton had been satisfactorily answered. Darby was away {179} from Plymouth for a fortnight, having asked Congleton and others to try to arrange a full church meeting to hear his charges against Newton, but when on his return he found that nothing had been done about this, he founded a rival meeting, with the help of Wigram, who owned the Raleigh Street Chapel and provided it for Darby's use. The first services of this rival congregation were on Sunday 28th December 1845, when Wigram preached in the afternoon and Darby in the evening.³¹⁸ Darby states that he had hired a private room for the breaking-of-bread, presumably on that Sunday, expecting five or six to attend, but in fact there were fifty or sixty.³¹⁹ From the following Sunday the breaking-of-bread was held regularly in Raleigh Street Chapel, and the division was thus confirmed.

Some of the participants in the dispute having returned to their homes in London, on Sunday 11th January 1846 at the breaking-of-bread service at Rawstorne Street Chapel, Congleton accused Wigram of helping Darby to make a schism at Plymouth. Since the meeting would not take up the matter Congleton withdrew from it, and afterwards refused to take sides with either Newton or Darby, though after 1848 he was in fellowship with Open Brethren. The Brethren in London tried several times to persuade Newton to appear before a meeting at Rawstorne Street, but he resolutely refused to do this, on the ground that such a meeting could not be a competent judicial assembly, his own church having already exonerated him. The first set of meetings to which he was invited, in April 1846, took place regardless of his absence; one of the leading figures was Chapman from Barnstaple, who suggested that the real trouble at Plymouth had been simply Newton's concentration of authority in himself. However after 1848 {180} Chapman too was in fellowship with Open Brethren. During 1846 Darby spent most of his time at Plymouth, where a tremendous undercover campaign was waged by both sides to recruit the uncommitted; it was in this campaign that the women of the Brethren community, hitherto in enforced quiescence, played a most significant part. They became passionate partisans of either Newton or Darby, Newton employing some of his female devotees in copying his tracts and letters, while Darby's followers were said to have boycotted the funeral of Newton's wife, who died in May 1846 at the height of the controversy.³²⁰ The fact that Newton was a popular preacher, and Darby an eligible bachelor of 45, may have played no small part in this proceeding. In November 1846 Darby's "Narrative of the facts connected with the separation of the writer from the congregation meeting in Ebrington Street" was published; this tract is a passionate party pamphlet, and while it is certain that Darby would never have been intentionally untruthful, he invariably throws the benefit of the doubt into the scale against Newton. The pacific and fair-minded Congleton wrote in February 1847 of Darby's account:

"As to John Darby's narratives, I am thoroughly disgusted with them, both the spirit of them and the falseness of them, though I do not charge him with intentional false-

318. Letter Congleton to Berger, 4/4/46, in the Fry Collection.

319. J. N. Darby, *op. cit.* note 289, in *Coll. Writ. Eccl.* Vol. IV p. 78.

320. *ibid.* pp. 81, 96, 99–101 and footnotes pp. 97 & 100. *cf.* note 329.

hood. He seems to me like a man intoxicated. I trust he will soon come to his senses ...”³²¹

A further series of meetings was held at Rawstorne Street in November 1846, to which Newton again refused to come, although he made a brief visit to London about this time and offered to answer privately any questions which were put to him. His London visit was made the excuse {181} for a note dated 13th December which was sent to him “on behalf of the saints meeting at Rawstorne Street” – though by Darby’s own admission there were some dissentients at the meeting on 11th December when this action was decided upon³²² – which refused him communion there. Since Newton had not applied for communion, this was tantamount to an act of excommunication, and it was treated as such by its recipient in a lengthy “Remonstrance” published on Christmas Day 1846. Tregelles, who was back at Plymouth from Italy, sent to Rawstorne Street a formal protest against the competency of their disciplinary meeting of 11th December, dissociating himself in advance from any decisions emanating from it.³²³ A final series of meetings was held at Rawstorne Street in February 1847, to which Newton once more refused to come; Darby was present at all three sets of meetings, and wrote accounts of the later two.³²⁴ The actions of Rawstorne Street against Newton, under the guidance of Darby and Wigram, were a definite step in the direction of federation and the growth of centralised authority in the Brethren movement, though these tendencies were officially disclaimed. The Brethren at Bristol did not participate in the disciplinary actions, and continued to receive to communion persons from all sides in the dispute; but the question of the exercise of inter-church communion discipline within the Brethren movement was clearly the bridge between the dispute of 1845 and the schism of 1848. The doctrinal controversy which broke in the summer of 1847, while it confirmed Newton’s downfall, provided only an effective smoke-screen for what would probably have been an inevitable eventual result. Once the principle of interference by an external body in the affairs of a local {182} church was allowed, the first step towards centralisation had been taken. Newton’s case against Rawstorne Street was that his “excommunication” constituted just such interference, and an intelligent observer might have concluded from the facts that the Brethren were at last beginning to evolve an acknowledged central authority with the right to decide, *inter alia*, on matters of exclusion from fellowship. The Brethren’s treatment of Newton, therefore, in particular before any question of fundamentally erroneous doctrine had been raised, is of the greatest importance in estimating the sequel in the schism of 1848.

By 1847, however, the controversy at Plymouth had not had far-reaching repercussions, though there was some disturbance at Exeter, where Newton had a number of friends including his cousin George Treffry. Treffry circulated among the Brethren at Exeter Newton’s tracts answering Darby’s charges and giving his reasons for refusing to attend the Brethren meetings in London, and was greatly maligned for doing so. On 10th January 1847 Treffry wrote to his cousin Amy Toulmin, who lived in Newton’s household:

321. Letter Congleton to Newton, 10/2/47, in Fry Collection 1847 Folio 2. Newton had asked Congleton to visit Plymouth, but he wrote declining.

322. J. N. Darby, “Account of the proceedings at Rawstorne Street in November and December 1846”, in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Eccl. Vol. IV* pp. 141–3.

323. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, footnote pp. 128–9.

324. J. N. Darby, *op. cit.* note 322 & *op. cit.* note 314.

“Dear Amy ... I am getting into a regular hornets’ nest. I sent a copy of the ‘Remonstrance’ and the ‘Correspondence’ to several persons, which appears to be a most tremendous offence! – I ought to have allowed people whose minds were exercised about the matter to procure copies themselves and not to send them around as I have done!! Satan doth not like to be disturbed. Send me 25 copies of Tregelles’ letter ... The fact of the matter is this: Satan is being foiled in his attempts to have it all his own way here & now he is beginning to foam and toss about like a ‘wild bull in a net’. – You must take care to keep me well supplied with Bombs to throw into the enemy’s camp.”³²⁵

{183} At this stage the official grounds of Darby’s separation at Plymouth were concerned with church order, especially the contravention of the practice of charismatic worship, and did not include questions of fundamental doctrine. However, in June 1847 Treffry lent to a “sister” at Exeter some notes taken at a lecture by Newton on the sixth Psalm. These notes fell into the hands of Harris and McAdam, who were at Exeter at this time, and without consulting Newton to ask if the notes were a fair representation of his teaching – a step which might have been thought essential since the notes had been taken down at speed as he lectured and without his knowledge or approval – Harris published in July 1847 a tract entitled “The sufferings of Christ as set forth in a lecture on Psalm Six”, in which he condemned Newton’s teaching as heretical with regard to the atoning sufferings of Christ. On 26th July Newton published an authoritative account of his views, and on 1st September his reply to Harris’ tract.³²⁶ Darby had recently returned from the south of France, and immediately published separate replies to these two tracts, in which he accused Newton of placing Christ under Divine wrath.³²⁷ Newton had said that Christ was under the “federal headship of Adam”, i. e. by being born into the human race He experienced some of the consequences of Adam’s guilt, in particular human suffering. Newton always maintained that Christ Himself never sinned, but the essential point in which he departed from traditional orthodoxy was his suggestion that only Christ’s suffering on the Cross was vicarious and atoning, while his other sufferings were the result of his membership of the race of Israel and were non-atoning. The controversy raged during the summer and autumn of 1847, and on 26th {184} November Newton published a “Statement and acknowledgement respecting certain doctrinal errors” in which he withdrew the doctrine of the federal headship, withdrew his two 1847 tracts for reconsideration, and stated explicitly “I do not ascribe any of Christ’s living experiences to the imputation of Adam’s guilt”. Most Brethren, however, felt that this withdrawal did not cover the special error of ascribing to Christ non-atoning sufferings as a member of Israel, and in early December Darby published a tract setting aside the “Statement” as worthless.³²⁸

325. Original letter in Fry Collection, 1847 Folio 1.

326. Respectively “Remarks on the sufferings of the Lord Jesus” and “Observations on a tract entitled ‘The sufferings of Christ as set forth in a lecture on Psalm Six’”.

327. Respectively “Observations on a tract entitled ‘Remarks on the sufferings of the Lord Jesus’” and “A plain statement on the sufferings of our blessed Lord”.

328. {260} J. N. Darby “Notice of ‘A statement ...’” At the end of his statement, Newton had said: “I do distinctly hold, that ... not one suffering, whencesoever originating, ever came upon (Christ), except because of and for the sake of *others*.” On the other hand he continued to affirm that “the Lord Jesus partook of certain consequences of Adam’s sin, of which the being possessed of a mortal body was one” and he did not yet allow that all these consequences were undergone vicariously in the full sense of substitutionary atonement. cf. Neatby, op. cit. p. 137.

Newton never reissued the tracts but he never formally repudiated them, and in February 1848 could see in them “nothing of importance to retract”.³²⁹ He eventually returned to orthodoxy by coming to believe that all Christ’s sufferings were endured vicariously and atoningly.

The result of this doctrinal controversy was Newton’s final departure from Plymouth on 8th December 1847, followed six days later by his mother and cousin Amy Toulmin. They stayed until February 1848 at Liskeard, moved to St. Austell and thence to London, where Newton established an independent Calvinist church very far removed from Brethren practice and with no ecclesiastical connections elsewhere. For a time at least only he and Tregelles, who remained a lifelong friend, were allowed to speak at the services.³³⁰ Newton married again on 24th April 1849, but the only child of the marriage died in infancy; he died in 1899 and was buried at Tunbridge Wells. A group of devoted disciples keep alive his memory and that of Tregelles, and a private publishing office continues to reissue his works.³³¹

The Brethren were not alone at this time among comparable groups in {185} having domestic quarrels over Christology. In the 1850s a long-latent split was developing among the Particular Baptists over the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship of Christ. The Particular Baptist denomination had been greatly strengthened by the infusion of new life at the same time as the Brethren movement had begun, and by this time Tiptaft and Philpot were leading members of the community. By 1860 there were two distinct groups of Particular Baptist churches which had renounced mutual fellowship, characterised by the names of the periodicals they circulated, the “Gospel Standard” (orthodox) and the “Earthen Vessel” – later the “Gospel Herald” (semi-Arian). In 1929 there were in Britain about 300 Gospel Standard churches and 350 Gospel Herald churches.³³² At a wider level, the years from 1847 onwards were peculiarly stormy in most British denominations. In the Church of England 1847 saw the start of the Gorham controversy, while in 1849 the “Fly-Sheet” controversy in Methodism, with its polemic tracts and arguments over the relationship of local churches to central organisation, has many parallels with the controversies among the Brethren.³³³ In the mid-1850s the “Rivulet Controversy” over the hymns of T. T. Lynch agitated the Congregationalists, though they were protected from formal schism by the principle of congregational autonomy.³³⁴ Remote as they were from most of the currents of thought influencing what they would have termed “the world”, the Brethren were not unaware of these arguments over doctrine and church polity;

329. According to Amy Toulmin, a cousin who remained in Newton’s household until 1849, in her account of the controversy written on 7/2/48; in the Fry Collection. See also her letter to Kate Gidley on 26/2/48 stating that Newton’s views on the person of Christ are “entirely unchanged”; Kate had apparently taken Darby’s side and now regretted it. Amy replied tartly to her pacific advances.

330. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 138 & footnote.

331. “The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony”, with H. Q. in Chiswick, whose heroes are Newton and Tregelles. See G. Fromow (ed.), “Teachers of the faith and future – the life and works of B. W. Newton and S. P. Tregelles”, London, n. d. (c. 1960).

332. S. F. Paul, “Historical sketch of the Gospel Standard Baptists”, Hove, n. d. (c. 1929); A. C. Underwood, *op. cit.* note 43, pp. 245–7.

333. Townsend, Workman & Eayrs, “A new history of Methodism”, London 1909, Vol. I pp. 529ff.

334. “The Rivulet: a contribution to Sacred Song”, by T. T. Lynch, Lond. 1855. Most of the polemic tracts in the dispute of 1855–7 are listed under T. T. Lynch in the B. M. L. Catalogue. See also an article on the dispute in the *Eclectic Review*, 1856.

Darby at least, from the evidence of his Collected Writings, was remarkably well-informed about them. Nor had the flow of seceders from the Establishment into the Calvinist churches ceased entirely, though they rarely gained as well-known a recruit as the Hon. & Rev. B. W. Noel, who in 1848 left his ministry at St. John's Chapel, Bedford {186} Row, London. His main reason was the State connection of the Church of England. For the next twenty years he ministered in John Street Baptist Chapel, and eventually became the President of the Baptist Union.³³⁵

To return to the Plymouth Brethren, the next development was the withdrawal from the Ebrington Street church of several of Newton's late associates in the ministry. The day before Newton left Plymouth (though he had already decided to leave) Soltau and Batten told him that they could no longer work with him in the church. At a meeting of several hundred gathered at Ebrington Street on Monday evening, 13th December 1847, they "confessed" in great emotion and withdrew, statedly from ministry but in fact from communion. Others withdrew also and Batten, Dyer, Haffner, Soltau and Walker all published "Confessions" during the next few weeks.³³⁶ These "Confessions" to some extent justify Darby's charges of clericalism and sectarianism, but there is no admission of moral obliquity on the part of any of the confessors, though Darby had distinctly charged all of them with this.³³⁷ One matter which Haffner made much of confessing was that Newton had been accustomed to prepare sermons and ministry before delivery, in practical denial of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Tregelles was most distressed by these "Confessions" which he believed had been made under great emotional pressure, and a reply to parts of them was drawn up under his guidance and published on 10th January 1848. This "Statement from Christians assembling in the name of the Lord in Ebrington Street, Plymouth" is clear and explicit and indicates the substantial orthodoxy of the remnant of the church. Mr. & Mrs. Batten and Soltau and his sister later desired reunion with Newton³³⁸, but Soltau for a time entered fellowship with the Darbyites, only later {187} joining the Open Brethren, among whom his family became prominent³³⁹. Subsequently Harris also left the Exclusives and became a well-known figure among the Open Brethren.³⁴⁰ The Newtonian congregation at Plymouth, now greatly depleted in numbers, moved to a chapel in Compton Street in midsummer 1848. Tregelles was for a time the leading figure here, and Newton occasionally visited Plymouth and preached there. In 1845 there had been about one thousand in fellowship at Ebrington Street, according to various Brethren histories; while an extant list of communicants at Raleigh Street in March 1847 contains 210 names.³⁴¹ Darby therefore carried with him a substantial minority, though more certainly

335. E. A. Payne, *op. cit.* note 43, p. 74.

336. "An appendix illustrating 'A Retrospect of events ...'", London 1849. This prints "Confessions" by H. W. Soltau (22/12/47), George J. Walker (7/1/48), J. E. Batten (23/12/47) and W. B. Dyer (31/12/47). Haffner's Confession is mentioned and quoted in S. P. Tregelles, *op. cit.* note 267, footnote pp. 15-6.

337. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 140 & footnote.

338. {261} Letter Toulmin to Gidley, 26/2/48, Fry Collection 1848 Folio 6.

339. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 84-8.

340. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, footnote p. 240.

341. In the Sibthorpe Collection. The basic list of 210 is probably in Darby's hand; there are supplementary lists of 40 and 80 names, the latter in different handwriting. These are probably later or for a different purpose; if they represent (*inter alia*) those who joined after the doctrinal controversy of summer 1847, the relative numbers are a remarkable confirmation that personal attachment to either Darby or

joined after the doctrinal dispute. However the Darbyite congregation must have lost half its membership after the 1848 split, since only 116 attended the morning meeting on 30/3/51 at Raleigh Street. On the same date there were 280 present in the morning at Compton Street, which was by now hardly a Brethren meeting at all.³⁴²

The second stage of the crisis, which had far-reaching consequences throughout the Brethren movement, centred on Bethesda Chapel in Bristol. Captain Woodfall had been a prominent friend of Newton's at Plymouth, and after the withdrawal of Soltau and Batten had written in vain asking him to return.³⁴³ In April 1848 Woodfall and his brother applied for communion at Bethesda while on a visit to Bristol, as had been their previous custom. Three of Darby's partisans in the congregation, Alexander, Nash, and Stancombe, objected, and at Craik's suggestion they themselves were appointed as investigators to test the soundness of Woodfall's brother, Woodfall himself being accepted as ignorant of the state of the controversy {188} since he had been travelling on the Continent during the recent strife. After the investigators' favourable report had been received, the Woodfalls were allowed to break bread at Bethesda. Darby, back from a French tour, visited Bristol about 20th April, and Müller asked him to preach on the following Sunday evening, 23rd April; Darby refused, saying that he had a previous engagement on the road to Exeter. Some days later, at a meeting of Brethren in Exeter, Darby stated that he could no longer go to Bethesda, since the Woodfalls had been received there, though he had not suggested anything of the kind to Müller at their meeting or by letter since.³⁴⁴ As in the case of Plymouth in 1845, Darby's method of action was to announce his own dissociation and allow the esteem in which he was held to ensure that others would follow his lead. This announcement must have been after 10th May, for on that date a meeting of about one hundred anti-Newtonian Brethren from all parts of the country was held at Bath at which, although there was some dissension, there was apparently no mention of a further split.³⁴⁵ Chapman and Congleton were both present at this meeting and would certainly have protested strongly if Darby had already indicated his intentions with regard to Bethesda. Soon after the Exeter meeting, Darby wrote from there to Müller giving the reasons for his decision, and in June 1848 Alexander seceded from the Bethesda meeting, circulating a document giving as his reason the possibility of various evils arising from the reception of the Woodfalls.

On Thursday 29th June a letter setting forth the communion principles of the Bethesda assembly, signed by ten leading brethren, was read with explanatory comments to a church meeting at Bethesda. This stated at the {189} outset in most unequivocal terms, the

Newton was a stronger factor than doubtful doctrine in the whole dispute, for the majority of secessions from Ebrington Street had taken place before Newton's unorthodox doctrine was revealed.

342. Religious Census Returns, H. O. 129/11/287. J. L. Harris was still in the district in 1851, for he signed the Return for an afternoon "gospel" meeting at Plymstock, as "occasionally ministering in ..." 68 persons attended here on the afternoon of 30/3/51: H. O. 129/11/286.

343. Original letter dated 14/12/47, in Fry Collection 1847 Folio 9. H. Groves (op. cit. note 214, p. 29) calls him "Colonel", but cf. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, footnote p. 157. The writer of the letter to Newton may well have been Capt. Woodfall's brother, in view of Groves' statement (loc. cit.) that "Col." Woodfall had been on the Continent during the Plymouth trouble; but neither Groves nor Neatby gives any initials, so it is impossible to be certain.

344. H. Groves, op. cit. note 214, pp. 29–31.

345. Eye-witness account quoted in W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, pp. 147–8. cf. W. Trotter, "The Whole Case of Plymouth & Bethesda", 1849.

orthodox beliefs of Bethesda upon the disputed matters, especially the Person of Christ. The Darbyites however seized upon a fatal paragraph which stated that even supposing Newton's teaching to be fundamentally heretical, this would not warrant Bethesda refusing communion to those coming from under his teaching unless they were convinced that such people were personally unsound in the faith. The "Letter of the Ten" also gave as the reasons why the Bethesda leaders were not willing to pass a church condemnation on Newton's tracts as Darby desired, (1) that to do so would set a dangerous precedent, for it was not to edification that people in Bristol should become involved with the controversies of Plymouth; and (2) that Newton's tracts were so obscure in their meaning, and his views so variable, that it would be difficult to ascertain for the purposes of the enquiry what he would acknowledge as his current opinions.³⁴⁶

Shortly after this document had been sanctioned by the church at Bethesda, Darby visited Bristol again, and when once more his request for a church condemnation of Newton's tracts was refused, he tried to force the issue by the threat of separating all other Brethren assemblies from Bethesda.³⁴⁷ Until the end of July 1848 Darby was mostly at Plymouth, but he then toured the northern meetings, visiting among others those at Keswick, Hull and Leeds.³⁴⁸ From Leeds on 26th August 1848 he issued to all meetings his famous "Bethesda circular" which stated in principle the whole subsequent discipline of Exclusivism.³⁴⁹ Darby's case was that Bethesda had not only refused to "judge the evil" of Newton's tracts but that such evil had been deliberately admitted; agents of Newtonian heresy {190} were actively at work in the Bethesda congregation; and the whole meeting was morally identified with this evil state of affairs. Any assembly which received into communion persons from Bethesda was similarly identified, and so the case of Bethesda "involves to my mind the whole question of association with brethren". Darby said that he himself would go neither to Bethesda, nor where persons from Bethesda were knowingly admitted. The Exclusive idea of "contamination" developed until it became something like the early Old Testament idea of holiness – almost a physical contagion. "Evil" could be transferred *ad infinitum* from assembly to assembly throughout the world; any meeting which knowingly admitted to communion a person in fellowship with an Open meeting – that is, a meeting willing to receive from Bethesda – was excluded, and any meeting which refused to sever links of fellowship with an excluded meeting was also rejected. This discipline was exacted to the remotest degree literally throughout the world, ultimately effecting the exclusion of men who had never even heard of Newton and his errors. Its outworking took some years to materialise, and an inevitable result was that eventually Exclusive assemblies would not allow members of other evangelical churches to communicate, while many Open Brethren continued to permit this. The system of communion discipline thus contracted the social and religious associations of the Exclusives until at length they would not join with other Christians, even evangelicals, in any form of worship.

346. The "Letter of the Ten" is quoted in full, with interspersed comment, in H. Groves, *op. cit.* note 214, pp. 33–44; comment on it from Darby's point of view is in W. Trotter, "The Whole Case of Plymouth & Bethesda".

347. H. Groves, *op. cit.* note 214, p. 47.

348. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I pp. 173–6; letters from Plymouth 18/7/48, Keswick 14/8/48, Hull 20/8/48.

349. H. Groves, *loc. cit.* note 347; the "Bethesda Circular" appears in full in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Doctrinal Vol. IV* pp. 253–8.

The exorbitant requirement of Darby's circular strained the affection of even his strongest supporters, but such was his immense personal influence in the movement that within a few months a majority of the {191} assemblies, except those most closely connected with Bristol and Barnstaple, had conformed, though in most cases with individual secessions. The main reasons for this were that Darby had travelled widely among the meetings and was highly esteemed as a spiritual guide, so that his word counted for a great deal among men who had little personal knowledge of the Bristol meeting, and also that Müller and Craik did not reply in print to the assiduous spoken and printed propagation of the Darbyite case. A number of tracts on the Darbyite side were written by Wigram and others, the most influential of which was William Trotter's "Whole Case of Plymouth and Bethesda". Darby's circular represented the parting of the ways in the Brethren movement; from the moment of its promulgation the course was set amongst those who accepted it, the Exclusives, towards the development of a closely-federated, centralised, high church sect whose practical attitude to Christian fellowship was very far removed from the ideals of the early Dublin Brethren; while amongst those who rejected it, the Open Brethren, the principle of congregational autonomy ensured at least the possibility of the survival of more catholic ideals. To glance ahead once more, it is fair to say that with individual exceptions on both sides, the two types of Brethrenism came to a large extent to represent two types of Christian mentality found in all communions – the introvert, quietist attitude which delights in biblical exegesis and finds its comfort in a close (if narrow) fellowship; and the extrovert, evangelistic and relatively oecumenical attitude which is much more concerned to widen the bounds of Christian fellowship than to narrow them. The subsequent history of the Brethren movement, especially in the {192} twentieth century, affords strong confirmation of this characterisation of the division between Exclusive and Open Brethren in 1848.

In the summer of 1848 Newton published "A letter on subjects connected with the Lord's humanity" which many Brethren felt reaffirmed some of his unorthodox doctrines, though in a modified form, and as a result of this the leaders at Bethesda decided after all to pass a church condemnation on his tracts, which was done in December 1848. This made no practical difference to the procedure regarding reception to communion at Bethesda. This remained as it had always been, that persons who after interview with the elder brethren were judged to be "sound in faith and godly in walk" would be admitted to communion regardless of their ecclesiastical connections elsewhere. After the Bethesda condemnation of Newton's tracts it seems that Darby made an attempt at a reconciliation. From December 1848 to June 1849 he had been on yet another visit to the south of France. At ten to one on a day in July 1849, Darby called on Müller at the recently-opened Orphan House on Ashley Down, Bristol, and said that as Bethesda had now judged Newton's tracts, there was no longer any reason why they should be separated. Müller replied that he had an engagement at one, and in any case since Darby had acted so wickedly in the matter there was no time to enter upon it immediately; whereupon Darby left and the two leaders never met again. This account was given by Müller, and Darby later stated that it was "utterly contrary to the truth", but neither denied that the interview took place, nor furnished an alternative account. If Müller's account of the meeting was accurate³⁵⁰, Darby left his presence to enforce literally to the ends {193} of the

350. {262} The evidence about this meeting is reviewed in G. H. Lang, "Antony (sic) Norris Groves, saint and pioneer", London 1939, appendix pp. 419–430. Exclusives sometimes had doubts about this meeting; a letter to Darby dated March 1878 from a man named Gray at Whitehaven has survived, in which

earth a decree which he had just admitted was obsolete. However according to several of Darby's published letters, he later "withdrew" the Bethesda circular, though this can have meant only that he ceased to invoke the actual document, while continuing the system of discipline which it implied.³⁵¹

One result of the 1848 schism was an increase in the number of Brethren meetings (though not in the total number of their adherents) through the addition of minority groups of one or other party in various places, for example the minority Exclusive meetings at Bristol and Hereford. Most of the meetings in the west became Open; in the north the meetings in Westmorland, and those at Liverpool and Hull, rejected Darby's circular, though the Hull meeting did not link up with Open Brethren. In London the two best-known meetings which became Open were at Orchard Street and at Tottenham. In all cases where meetings became Open, there were at least some Darbyite secessions; it is almost impossible to determine to what extent the reverse took place, since there was not the same sense of cohesion about Open Brethren as there was among the Exclusives, and the Brethren at Bristol made no attempt whatsoever to entice members away from Darbyite congregations. It is therefore probably true that rather more than half the Brethren community in Britain belonged in 1851 to Exclusive meetings. The 1851 Census Returns for Bristol are missing, but according to Müller's Annual Reports the total number in fellowship at Bethesda and Salem Chapels was 675 at the end of 1847 and 612 at the end of 1850; this was the only period of decline, and during it Müller records that 82 persons left the meeting. {194} Most of these formed the nucleus of the Bristol Exclusive assembly.

Two examples of the early operation of Darby's decree are especially instructive. One of its earliest victims was Groves himself, who had returned to England from India in March 1848 and stayed for fifteen months, spending much of his time at Bristol. In early 1849 he visited the meeting at Brook Street Chapel, Tottenham, and took the communion there. The Tottenham meeting was a sizeable one and was well-known among Brethren because of the presence there of its two ex-Quaker founder members, the brothers John and Robert Howard. Nevertheless when it became known that Groves had been received to communion, W. H. Dorman, one of the leading figures at Rawstone Street, wrote to John Howard intimating that the Tottenham meeting came under Darby's ban of excommunication. A caustic correspondence ensued, first between Howard and Dorman and then between Groves and Dorman; in the latter exchange Dorman did not hesitate to impute doctrinal error to Groves, apparently without any evidence, and even Cronin, who had endured unimaginable hardships with Groves in the East, wrote to him at this time terminating their association.³⁵² Cronin's own excommunication by the Exclusives in 1881 made a sad ending to his life, though it meant that he was able to renew fellowship with his old friend Congleton. Darby's discipline thus ultimately rejected almost all the original founders: Groves, Congleton, Cronin, Newton and Hall; only Bellett and Wigram died still in communion with him. At a church meeting on 4th March 1849, the Brethren at Tottenham adopted a statement of principles which was printed on a board still displayed in Brook Street Chapel, and which summarises the position taken by Open {195} assemblies:

Gray asks Darby to state whether the Open Brethren account of the meeting is accurate; unfortunately there is no trace of a reply. Gray's letter is in the Sibthorpe Collection.

351. e. g. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I pp. 264 & 267 (letters of 1852); Vol. III pp. 391–2 (letter of 1856).

352. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, pp. 177–181.

“Special circumstances having occurred in connexion with Christians, who, from time to time, are or may be, making application to be received as in communion at the Lord’s Table, we desire to make known our individual convictions and collective judgement as to the path which we believe to be well-pleasing to the Lord in this matter, and in which we desire to walk.

- We find our centre of union with each other, and with all saints, in Christ, *as one in Him*, and our power of fellowship by the Holy Ghost.
- We therefore desire to receive to the Lord’s table those whom He has received; time being allowed for confidence to be established in our minds that those whom we receive are indeed the Lord’s, and opportunity afforded for enquiring into and clearing away any imputation or occasion of scandal in any so applying.
- We welcome to the table on individual grounds, each saint, not because he or she is a member of this or that gathering or denomination of Christians nor because they are followers of any particular leader, but on such testimony as commends itself to us as being sufficient.
- We distinctly refuse to be parties to any exclusion of those who, we are satisfied, are believers – except on grounds personally applying to their individual faith and conduct.”

This statement is an important contemporary witness to the position taken by a meeting not directly involved in the troubles at Plymouth or Bristol, and which therefore had a greater opportunity of judging on the ground of principles rather than personalities. The first clause of para. 2 echoes {196} a favourite saying of Groves’, while although Darby is not mentioned by name he is clearly in mind in paragraphs 3 and 4.

Another whole meeting which was excommunicated by the Exclusives, though under rather different circumstances, was the one at Hull. Its leading figure Andrew Jukes had attended the Bath conference of 10th May 1848 as a convinced anti-Newtonian³⁵³, but although he had never met the Bristol leaders he sympathised with their neutral position. In the nearest other meetings, at Leeds, Otley and Scarborough, the influence of William Trotter, a strong supporter of Darby who nevertheless had not been personally involved in events at Plymouth or Bristol, was paramount. In November 1848 the Leeds and Otley meetings issued a circular to nearby assemblies which was an echo of Darby’s. The ensuing correspondence between Jukes, on behalf of the meeting at Hull, and John Willans and William Trotter, the “leaders” at Leeds and Otley respectively, sheds most interesting light on the informal power structure which had grown up among the Brethren.³⁵⁴ The Brethren were universally agreed about the heretical nature of Newton’s teaching, and the great majority of them agreed with Darby against Newton over matters of church order, but they were not agreed on the necessary course of discipline arising from the situation. Further, it seemed to Jukes and many others that in the case of Müller and Craik no doctrine was at stake, and that they had been judged and excommunicated solely for

353. W. Trotter, op. cit. note 345.

354. The “echo” circular is printed at the end of “An appendix ...” (op. cit. note 336). It was dated October 1848, as a lithographed letter, and was shortly afterwards printed as a tract.

The correspondence between Jukes and Willans/Trotter, dated 14/11/48 and 27/11/48 from Jukes, 22/11/48 from Willans & Trotter, was printed and is in Hull Central Library in two tracts. (L.001.JUK.4 & 5).

refusal to submit to an ecclesiastical ruling; yet such a ruling was *a priori* impossible among the Brethren since there was no formal power structure. Nevertheless everyone knew that the real authority lay in effect with Darby, and this was the crucial {197} issue for Jukes. His second reply to Willans and Trotter, dated 27th November, makes a thinly-veiled reference to Darby in reply to their warning that “the wolf (i. e. Newton’s doctrine) is at the door”:

“Such a wolf may, and probably will, ‘come in sheep’s clothing’, ‘as an angel of light’, yea ‘transforming himself into Christ’s apostle’, professing great zeal, in word, for the person of Christ, while he is tearing the body of Christ to pieces ... Who, I ask, has scattered the sheep in Yorkshire? Is it Mr. Newton and his views? Nay, verily, for as you know, we are fully agreed upon these points ...”

Jukes goes on to compare the situation in which he is now placed with that before his secession from the Church of England, when his superiors condemned him for his willingness to hold communion with dissenters. His statement clearly shows the conflict between the catholic ideals of Groves and the ecclesiasticism of Darby’s followers. The first of the following quotations is from Jukes’ earlier letter to Willans and Trotter, the second from his later one:

“I believe that George Müller and other beloved brethren at Bristol have, in a trying case of ecclesiastical discipline, been lacking in energy. But my judgement respecting their lack of perception and energy in a matter of ecclesiastical discipline is no reason for my rejecting them from the Lord’s table; much less is the error of the rulers of the Bristol gathering a reason for your excommunicating me and brethren like me, because we will not be “forced” to reject all whom you have been “forced to separate from”. I cannot, I have never dared, in the present state of the church, to “decline communion” with any godly brother or {198} sister from out of any sect or party. Even a clergyman ... would be welcome to the table of the Lord, if as a brother he felt willing or free to come.”

“The thing which is now dividing and here scattering the sheep of Christ, is something very different from Mr. Newton’s views. It is your requirement that godly brethren shall, to hold communion with you, give up their conscience respecting receiving those whom God receives. This is the evil spirit now scattering the sheep; and it boots little for you, while this is at our doors, to ignore anything of this, and to attempt to make us believe that the one evil we have to guard against is Mr. Newton’s doctrine.

But I am not to be so misled, for I have seen this wolf before. Six years ago I was met by the selfsame spirit under the selfsame guise; a guise, indeed, then as now, of zeal for God, and for the discipline and purity of the church: yet requiring me to separate from godly brethren, and to reject the holy as profane. I was then, as a clergyman, asked, – (just as you have asked me), as the term of my ministerial connexion with the establishment here, – whether I would receive Christians out of certain sects. My answer, then as now, was simply this, those whom Christ receives I cannot reject. For this I was then judged by what calls itself The Church. For the same answer I am now judged by you ...

I cannot – after what I have heard again and again from your own lips, of the difference of receiving a brother out of a sect, and countenancing the evil of the sect, and of our bounden duty to receive all brethren, – understand how you justify your course towards George Müller. It seems to me – forgive my saying it, sectarian in the extreme

... George Müller {199} I have never seen, nor have I ever been at any of the Bristol meetings; while to you I am bound by many ties, of personal favours as well as grace. But I know “the faith” of many of the Bristol saints, that it is “spoken of throughout the whole world”. And I see not how or why, while personally they are pure, I am to judge them, or to be judged for willingness to receive them.”

These extended quotations are of great importance, since they represent the contemporary opinion of a man of some intellectual stature, who refused to accept Darby’s decree simply because he had signed it, and who was evidently not influenced by existing personal associations with Bethesda. There were however no other nearby Open meetings with which Jukes could easily fall into association, so that his congregation gradually approximated to an independent Baptist chapel in which Jukes adopted a more or less formal ministerial position.

A less critical but nevertheless illuminating sidelight on the local effects of the 1848 schism is given by the eye-witness account of William Townsend, who at the time, as a boy of fourteen, attended the Great College Street meeting in London, though he had not begun to “break bread”. Townsend suggests that many ordinary members of Brethren congregations could not understand what the controversy was all about. One Sunday morning (presumably in late 1848 or early 1849) a simple woman from Bristol “who knew nothing about this ‘evil’” visited the Great College Street meeting and was allowed to break bread there. After the meeting an excitable supporter of Darby dashed round the room asking “Are you for Christ or Belial?” As a result of this, Darby’s supporters left the {200} meeting.³⁵⁵ It does seem that in many places it was the younger men, rather than those who recalled the earliest days of the movement, who forced divisions in the meetings, and this is not surprising.³⁵⁶ Of the “founders”, the most rabid controversialist was certainly Wigram, and it was his initiative through tracts and preaching which raised the question of division in many places. There is evidence that Darby himself disapproved of Wigram’s actions in this respect.³⁵⁷ While of course Darby cannot be held directly responsible for the excesses of his over-zealous disciples – in fact he was out of England for much of the time when the local divisions were taking place – the responsibility is squarely his for instituting a course of discipline which brought these results. It seems however only fair to close by stating Darby’s case in his own words; the quotation is from a letter written in French from Hereford in October 1851:

“First I must tell you that I believe that if one meeting receives the members of another, and the members of the former go there in their turn, there is a bond between the two ... This is how it is then as to B.(ethesda). Doctrine is not in question, but faithfulness to Christ with respect to doctrine or holiness. I would not receive a person who knowingly formed part of a meeting which admits heretics, or persons whose conduct is bad, because the principle of indifference to good and evil, to error and truth, is as bad as the wrong action ... I believe that the church is bound to be jealous with respect to the glory of the Person of Christ. If Christ is despised, I have no principle of union. I believe that B. has acted with profound contempt for the Lord, to say nothing of {201} brethren ... Mr. N. was maintaining a doctrine of which Mr. Müller

355. William Townsend, op. cit. note 184, p. 29.

356. cf. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, p. 191, quoting a tract by Henry Young entitled “A plea for the Honour of Christ”.

357. *ibid.* p. 171 & cf. p. 177; cf. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 250 (letter from Hereford October 1851).

himself said that if it were true, Christ would have needed to be saved as much as we did ... (There follows a summary of Newton's unorthodox teaching and evidence that its propagation was allowed in Bethesda; Darby then characterises the acceptance of the "Letter of the Ten" as indifference to the truth of the Person of Christ implied in the refusal to judge Newton's doctrine) ... Indifference to Christ is a grave sin: an assembly which bases itself publicly on this principle I cannot accept as a christian assembly. Assemblies which are connected with B., which go there and receive from thence, are one with B. ... I am deeply convinced that the basis of the B. meeting is contempt of Christ, and I do not walk with those who accept it, and I will not mix with it; it would be indifference to my own conduct. If consequently I walk alone, it is well; I am content as to myself ..."³⁵⁸

Although Darby claimed to have acted only as an individual obeying the dictates of his conscience, he was perfectly well aware that his action had been instrumental in forming the Exclusive party, and the 1848 schism can therefore be distinctly characterised as one concerning ecclesiastical authority and church government, basically the issue of centralisation versus congregational autonomy. Darby's belief that the basis of gathering at Bethesda was indifference to true doctrine was simply incorrect. What really divided Müller and Darby was their differing attitudes to the problem of authority in the church, Darby having an intense desire that believers should be practically united as "One Body", not in a formal organisation but around an authoritative {202} voice speaking in "the act of the assembly". Exclusive Brethren came to attach an immense authority to this, and Neatby commented:

"The Darbyites have always wielded the weapon of excommunication with all the assumption of the Church of Rome itself, and within their little sphere ... they have inspired hardly less terror."³⁵⁹

Darby's ultimate view of communion fellowship was clearly far different in practice from that of the early days at Dublin and Plymouth, but his fusion of the high church conception with an intense biblicism proved strongly attractive to many evangelicals in the later years of the nineteenth century. In 1850 Francis Newman compared Darby to Ignatius Loyola³⁶⁰, and the comparison was well-supported by Darby's success in holding together for a period of thirty years, simply by the force of his own personality, a world-wide confederacy united only by a relatively obscure ecclesiastical discipline; his followers were "without written code or constitution, without denominational history or traditions; they had no national or provincial synods; and they possessed as their distinctive tenet only an ecclesiastical formula of a most subtle and impracticable description. Yet, till within a year of Darby's death, they cohered so perfectly that every minutest act of discipline that was recognised in any part of the world was recognised in every other."³⁶¹

The stability and catholicity of Open Brethrenism after the 1848 rupture cannot be ascribed solely to the independency principle removing all occasion of schism, though this obviously contributed since local disputes did not occasion general schism as was bound to happen in fully-developed Exclusivism. A disagreement between two neighbouring

358. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I pp. 245–250.

359. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, pp. 214–6.

360. F. W. Newman, op. cit. note 94, p. 34.

361. W. B. Neatby, op. cit. note 36, pp. 193–4.

Open {203} Brethren assemblies could occur without affecting the relations of either with the community at large, while among the Exclusives all disciplinary decisions had to be ratified centrally, thereby forcing the exclusion of one of the parties in every quarrel. More important was the fact that the original large-hearted conception of Christian communion towards which Groves aspired was embodied far more deeply among Open Brethren than in Exclusivism; the Open Brethren continued to regard Groves as the originator of their principles, as the Exclusives still regard Darby. The unity of Exclusivism was able to survive, however, only as long as Darby lived; and when he died in April 1882 the first great schism was resulting in the formation of the Kelly party. Since then the Exclusive Brethren have fragmented into a considerable number of mutually-excommunicated circles of meetings. The Open Brethren have suffered only one major secession, the “Needed Truth” cleavage of 1889, which resulted in the estrangement of a few dozen meetings, mostly in northern England, to form a closely-federated group with an exclusive discipline. The heyday of Exclusivism was in the period from 1860 to 1880, while since then the Open Brethren have far outstripped the Exclusives numerically.

A bitter postscript to the 1848 schism was written in 1866 by Dorman, who for eighteen years had been one of the principal ministers of Exclusive discipline. In company with Captain Hall and some less well-known Brethren, he left Exclusivism as a result of a controversy over Darby’s doctrines of the sufferings of Christ which many felt approximated to those which had been held by Newton. The realisation that the whole Exclusive ecclesiastical edifice rested upon the certainty of Newton’s {204} heresy caused a complete reappraisal of his position. Like Jukes at Hull in 1848, he became aware that the real issue was not a doctrinal but an ecclesiastical one. Darby’s doctrine seemed to have approached so close to Newton’s that Dorman wrote of the fine distinction between them:

“When it is made the sole basis of our differential communion, the sole ground of an unyielding and unsparing discipline, it becomes the conscience, it forces it, to look a little more deeply into the matter.”

It is fitting to close this description of the division of 1848 with a final quotation from a man peculiarly well qualified to judge its results, who had spent nearly two decades supporting them only to find that he had been deceived. Dorman wrote as follows after his secession from the Exclusives:

“My heart has been withered by the necessity of schooling Christians – young and old, ignorant and well-informed – in the mysteries of an act of discipline of eighteen years’ standing, and in endeavouring to shew the present bearings of “the Bethesda question” ... At first ... all this was pursued as necessary to the maintenance of purity of doctrine ... and I honestly thought it so myself. But this guise is now utterly and rudely stripped away ...

What possible correspondence is there between a company of Christians, or ever so many companies, meeting simply in the name of Christ ... and that of an immense ecclesiastical ramification, which is everywhere subject ... to Mr. D’s decrees? ... The one is as wide and as free as the gracious heart of Christ can make it ... The other is as narrow and sectarian, and as hard also, as the domination of man can desire it.”³⁶²

362. W. H. Dorman, op. cit. note 296.

Chapter V.

Life and worship among the early Brethren.

Some description of Brethren worship has already been given, but it is time for a more general survey to be attempted. This will involve filling in a considerable number of details, and in particular a study of Darby's attitude to various matters since this became characteristic of much of the community, especially the Exclusives after 1848. It has already been pointed out that in both origin and continued appeal the Brethren movement attracted a good proportion of cultured people, though as the nineteenth century progressed its social composition gradually broadened and lowered, especially among Open Brethren. The dignifying effect of Calvinism was also generally operative among the Brethren, and it was heightened by their strong awareness of having recovered lost ideals, and therefore being God's chosen vessels to bring this recovery to the notice of unenlightened believers in other churches. Although this apparent spiritual conceit aroused great resentment among other Christians³⁶³, the Brethren were not the first to receive such criticism, and at its best their mood was more one of shouldering a responsibility than enjoying a privilege. As regards Calvinist doctrine, although Brethren universally accepted the doctrine of eternal punishment³⁶⁴ and the doctrine of unconditional election³⁶⁵, there seems to have been a good deal less explicit emphasis on them in worship and hymnology than among, for example, the Particular Baptists.

{206} These factors strongly influenced the development of Brethren piety and worship, one of whose most attractive characteristics was its lack of ostentation. We possess an interesting eye-witness account of a communion service at Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, written by a lady who joined the Brethren community there in 1840:

“I had come from a well filled, well upholstered London Chapel with grand organ, well played, and good singing, and where the élite attended. Our pastor was a gentleman of means and education and dressed as such, with knee breeches, silk stockings, buckled shoes and ample shirt front. In the pulpit he wore a large silk scarf on his shoulders. Imagine my surprise on the first Sunday morning when I entered Bethesda, a large, bare Chapel, half empty. A very few grave-looking men and women came in and knelt down for a few moments, then rising sat with closed eyes till the Service began. The sisters' dress was grotesquely ugly. A coarse brown woollen dress with a

363. {263} See for example the hostile article in the *Eclectic Review* for May 1839 (1839, pp. 571–590) which described the most unattractive characteristics of the Plymouth Brethren as (a) their spiritual pride and despotism, (b) their unwholesome gloom about the world, (c) their disdainful isolation, and (d) their over-literalist interpretation of scripture.

364. E. K. Groves, “Bethesda Family Matters”, London n. d. (1885), p. 124 gives “non-eternity of punishment” as an example of a doctrine the holding of which would exclude from fellowship at Bethesda; and Bethesda was representative of the most tolerant doctrinal opinion in Brethrenism. Darby wrote against annihilationist teaching: *Letters of J. N. D.* Vol. I p. 590 (letter dated March 1867); also “Brief scriptural evidence on the doctrine of eternal punishment, for plain people”, in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D.*, Doctrinal Vol. II pp. 1–21.

365. cf. *Letters of J. N. D.* Vol. II p. 307 (letter of March 1874, referring to a dispute Darby had with Moody at Chicago).

drab shawl, a straight speckled straw bonnet with drab or brown veil, servants and mistresses all alike. Soon a brother rose and prayed. Now we were at once in the presence of God. It was Spirit-led prayer. I forgot the dress and all else, then a pause, then a hymn, sung like a funeral dirge with closed eyes and all sitting, and very badly sung too. Another prayer and then the bread and wine were passed round; pause again, then Prayer. Now Mr. Craik stood up to speak. All had their Bibles and used them ...”³⁶⁶

Where Brethren inherited for use in public worship buildings previously constructed for other religious communities, such as Raleigh Street Chapel in Plymouth, they could naturally do little about the existing design; but {207} wherever they built their own meeting-places they attempted to apply their ecclesiastical principles. Meeting-houses were provided with benches rather than pews, and in keeping with the charismatic principle there was no elevated pulpit, though a reading desk was generally provided for the use of the preacher at “gospel” services. At the service for breaking-of-bread, the seating was as far as possible arranged round the table on all sides, to avoid all appearance of ministerial control of proceedings. Again we have an eye-witness description of Ebrington Street Chapel in Plymouth, written by a man who joined the Brethren there in 1843:

“This was a large plain building, erected according to their own plans, without a gallery. The large table was placed in the centre, as the most prominent object, around which were ranged the seats on a gentle rise from the floor, so that everyone could look upon it. There were no pews, but plain and comfortable benches. The acoustic properties of the spacious hall were, however, very deficient, so that those who spoke, unless possessed of very strong voices, were compelled to stand at the table.”³⁶⁷

This last comment is of particular interest, since it will be remembered that one of Darby’s complaints about Plymouth was that the principle of charismatic worship had been compromised, *inter alia*, by the requirement that those who spoke during the conduct of worship should come out from their places and stand at the table. Darby felt that this threatened to distinguish them as a special or privileged class, or at least to inhibit the participation of shy or inexperienced persons. The very size of the Ebrington Street Chapel made it difficult to attain the intimacy in worship desired by the Brethren, and as far as can be ascertained no subsequent {208} Brethren meeting-place, at least in Britain, has ever been so large. Indeed there was a tendency, especially among Exclusives after 1848, to make the circumstances of worship as un-ecclesiastical as possible. The place of meeting, even if a separate Chapel, was invariably referred to as “The Room”, and if no separate Chapel was available there was often a preference for bizarre meeting-places such as lofts and upper rooms.³⁶⁸

In Brethren worship – that is to say, strictly speaking, the services for breaking-of-bread as opposed to those with evangelistic intent – there was very little place for the confession of sin. This was often commented upon critically by observers, but the Brethren believed it to have clear theological justification. Believing themselves to be in a

366. Quoted in a centenary pamphlet: E. R. Short, “The Story of Bristol Bethesda”, 1932, pp. 8–9.

367. Recollection by W. H. Cole, an Open Brother, in 1902; quoted in G. H. Lang, *op. cit.* note 350, appendix pp. 410–7 (this extract p. 411).

368. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 266.

“state of grace”, they were forgiven once and for all, and therefore did not continue to ask for what they already possessed. Not that they believed perfection was practically attainable, but the Lord’s Supper being par excellence the service for believers, the emphasis was laid on thanksgiving for free access to God’s presence rather than on the unworthiness of the worshipper. This tendency was reflected in Brethren hymnology; for example Darby’s revisions of traditional hymns for inclusion in Brethren collections generally omitted or amended phrases asking for God’s grace and renewal. The worship expressed generally in Brethren hymns was strongly pietistic and there was a great emphasis on the Christian’s justified standing before God through the atoning blood of Christ, the freedom of his access into God’s presence in worship, and the intense reality of heaven. The vital part which hymnology plays in developing the atmosphere in any religious community – particularly one like the Brethren where so many other possible {209} sources of influence are denied – justifies the following quotations from some of Darby’s best-known hymns as characteristic of the mood of much Brethren worship; dates of composition are bracketed³⁶⁹:

Hark! ten thousand voices crying
 “Lamb of God!” with one accord;
 Thousand thousand saints replying
 Wake at once the echoing chord ...

By the Spirit all pervading,
 Hosts unnumbered round the Lamb
 Crown’d with light and joy unfading
 Hail Him as the great “I AM”.
 (1835)

Rise, my soul, thy God directs thee,
 Stranger hands no more impede;
 Pass thou on, His hand protects thee,
 Strength that has the captive freed ...

Though thy way be long and dreary,
 Eagle strength He’ll still renew;
 Garments fresh and foot unwearied
 Tell how God hath brought thee through.

When to Canaan’s long-loved dwelling
 Love divine thy foot shall bring;
 There with shouts of triumph swelling,
 Zion’s songs in rest to sing –

369. Taken from Darby’s 1881 revision of Wigram’s 1856 “Hymns for the little flock”, nos. 14, 76, 79 and 139 respectively. Of course it is impossible to ascertain how much these hymns were amended between the date of composition and 1881. For a critical survey of Plymouth Brethren hymns see J. S. Andrews, “Brethren hymnology” in *The Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. XXVIII No. 4, October–December 1956, pp. 208–229.

There no stranger – God shall meet thee,
 Stranger thou in courts above,
 He who to His rest shall greet thee,
 Greet thee with a well-known love.
 (1837)

{210} Rest of the saints above,
 Jerusalem of God,
 Who in thy palaces of love,
 Thy golden streets have trod? ...

Who shall to me that joy
 Of saint-thronged courts declare;
 Tell of that constant sweet employ
 My spirit longs to share?

That rest secure from ill,
 No cloud of grief e'er stains,
 Unfailing praise each heart doth fill,
 And love eternal reigns.
 (1845)

This world is a wilderness wide!
 We have nothing to seek nor to choose;
 We've no thought in the waste to abide;
 We've nought to regret nor to lose.

'Tis the treasure we've found in His love
 That has made us now pilgrims below,
 And 'tis there, when we reach Him above,
 As we're known, all His fulness we'll know.
 (1849)

Musical instruments were never used in worship among the Brethren, although Open Brethren have almost universally allowed their use – at least in “gospel” services – in the present century. The Exclusives have remained without instrumental assistance, their position no doubt having been influenced by Darby’s recorded views: “As a rule music is a very dangerous occupation: it cultivates sentiment without conscience ...”³⁷⁰ This comment was to a lady with reference to young people learning music, but with particular reference to worship Darby wrote as follows:

“All these pleas of ‘gifts of God’ are bringing in nature, when it is {211} fallen, into the worship and service of the new man and the Lord, and spoiling it ... (Music is) not a thing evil in itself, but a connecting sensuous pleasure with spiritual life ... Harps and organs down here began in Cain’s city when he had gone out from the presence of the Lord ... We are dead and risen with Christ, and belong to another world. Hence I cannot seek my enjoyment in what belongs to the old, though I may recognise God’s

370. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III p. 47 (1879?).

work in it ... It is not a legal prohibition, but the heart elsewhere. If I could put a poor sick father to sleep with music, I would play the most beautiful I could find. But it only spoils any worship as bringing in the pleasure of sense into what ought to be the power of the Spirit of God. They cannot go really together, save as water may take away the taste of wine ... Christians have lost peace and moral influence by bringing in nature and the world as harmless. All things are lawful to me. But, as I said, you cannot mix flesh and Spirit. We need all our energies under grace to walk in the latter ...”³⁷¹

In spite of the inevitable contraction of their religious and social connections after 1848, the Exclusive Brethren practised an elaborate hospitality within their own ranks, and entirely supported their own poor and aged. The following description, which relates to the early 1860s, is of particular value because it was written by a man who had subsequently left the Exclusives for the Open Brethren:

“I was presently struck with the care they bestowed on such as were brought into their midst. One person would find him a comfortable seat; another perhaps hand him a bible; a third would call for him to take him to a meeting; a fourth would lend him one or more books as especially {212} suitable; a fifth would aid and counsel in matters of business; a sixth would write on his behalf to another meeting in some distant city, if he was going there, so that he should not be neglected or forgotten. In fact, instead of telling such an one to make himself at home, *they made a home* for each one that was added to their number, with such loving and constant forethought in little things, that I was charmed, and my heart made captive. On enquiry, I found that the largeness of a meeting in no way interfered with the exercise of this lovely care, for there were always half a dozen or more members offering to look after the new arrival. Not only men-pastors, but women-pastors, and even child-pastors were to be found in some way engaged on behalf of those added to the flock. It was no temporary attention either, but one that grew and increased, especially in times of sickness or sorrow.”³⁷²

Another attractive side to the lack of ostentation in Brethren piety was the fact, already mentioned, that there was no development of practices deriving from an exces-

371. W. G. Turner, “John Nelson Darby”, 2nd edn. 1944, p. 41.

372. E. K. Groves, op. cit. note 364, pp. 160–1. cf. Neatby, op. cit. p. 276. The practice of the Exclusives in this respect seems to strikingly exemplify William Trotter’s ideals about wealth and the Christian community, written before he had come into contact with Brethren (see {264} note 251). The quotation is from “The foolishness of God ...”, 1841:

(1) We believe that the possession of riches exposes a man’s spiritual interests to peculiar danger: that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.

(2) We believe that the only way for a rich man to escape this danger ... is to employ the whole of his property according to the will of God. We believe that God’s will on this subject is, that we should, 1st, honestly provide ourselves and our families with food and coverings. 2nd, that we should administer to the necessities of saints, and 3rd, that, as we have opportunity, we should do good unto all men.

(3) We believe that to accumulate or retain property for any purposes but these ... is to lay up *for ourselves* treasures on earth ...

(4) It is our conviction that if these principles were reduced to practice, the churches of the Redeemer would provide for their own poor and deserving members, and thus take away all excuse for Christians connecting themselves with Benefit Societies or any other institution of the kind.

sively literal interpretation of scripture, such as “tongues” and faith-healing. Darby could recall only two instances, both presumably in the early years, when the Brethren had anointed the sick by request, one in Plymouth and the other in Switzerland, but he was evidently no great advocate of such practices.³⁷³ It may be significant that the similar instance when F. W. Newman was ill at Aleppo in autumn 1831, was not recorded in any subsequent published accounts of the missionary journey, though Groves had mentioned it in a letter to England in October 1831:

“When Mr. Newman was at the worst, and they had given up all hopes of him, they anointed him with oil according to the 14th of the 5th of James, {213} and prayed over him, and the Lord had mercy on them ... and restored him.”³⁷⁴

On the other hand a certain naivety in their personal behaviour was displayed by many of the early Brethren. Examples already mentioned are Groves’ treating the theft of his Dublin trip money as direct guidance from God, and the remarkable hand-to-mouth existence practised by Chapman, Gribble and – par excellence – Müller. One of the most interesting examples of this attitude is afforded by the account of Parnell’s second marriage.³⁷⁵ He had married Cronin’s sister at Aleppo, but she died shortly afterwards; Cronin himself was already a widower, and Groves’ first wife fell victim to the plague before the follow-up party reached Bagdad. Mrs Constantine was an Armenian widow, the sister of the wife of the British Resident in Bagdad Colonel Taylor. In the tragic circumstances of the political turmoil which followed hard on the heels of the plague, it seemed essential to the three brethren that this lady should be provided for; a woman was also urgently needed in the missionary household, since after the death of Cronin’s mother shortly after arrival at Bagdad, none of the female members of the party had survived. The story afterwards circulated among the Brethren in England that Groves, Cronin and Parnell drew lots to decide which of them should propose to Mrs. Constantine, the lot falling on Parnell, who apparently made a long and successful marriage with the lady. Writing after Parnell’s death, his biographer E. K. Groves says of this incident:

“In all probability, those who originated the story scarcely intended more than that the matter had been committed to God by all the three friends, as in itself desirable, and that Mr. Parnell determined to make {214} the offer. Few dream of making family life subject to the higher call of God’s service, and therefore many may find it hard to understand the spirit in which this marriage was entered into ...”

However sympathetic one may be towards this kind of attitude, inevitably it had its less attractive side. William Townsend, whose account of life among the Brethren has already been quoted more than once, wrote as follows about the easy assumption of being able to “know the Lord’s mind” which he found among Brethren in Brighton in the 1860s:

“This easy assumption on their part always troubled me; yet some of these would even declare that we ought to “know the Lord’s mind” as to which streets we should take in going from one part of the town to another. I would often enquire in detail how they understood when they had attained this knowledge, but I could never get

373. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III pp. 256–8.

374. A. N. Groves, *Journal II* (op. cit. note 78, London 1832) p. 302. This incident is not recorded in H. Groves, op. cit. note 85.

375. H. Groves, op. cit. note 85, pp. 44ff.

any “light” upon it. But this was equalled by a “brother” at West Street, who found that it was “the Lord’s mind” that he should engage himself to a certain “sister”; and afterwards he found that it was the Lord’s mind that he should break off the engagement; and yet again, some time afterwards, he discerned that it was the Lord’s mind that he should renew the engagement. This travesty of such solemn matters made me sad.”³⁷⁶

The famous anthropologist Philip Gosse was for a few years in the late 1840s and early 1850s associated with the Plymouth Brethren community in London, although contrary to popular belief the book “Father and Son” by his son Edmund does not refer to this period. Edmund’s earlier biography of his father, however, does give considerable information about the Brethren movement at the time. Philip Gosse was a Wesleyan until 1843, [215] attended the Open Brethren meeting at Hackney in London for a few years from April 1847, during which time he was married at Tottenham where he knew the Howards, but on removal to St. Marychurch in Devon in 1857 after his wife’s death from cancer, he established a church which although Baptist in practice was not formally connected with any ecclesiastical body. In the same year he published the famous book “Omphalos” which suggested that God had put the fossils in the rocks ready-made to test the faith of men. It was at St. Marychurch that his son Edmund was baptised in 1859 at the age of ten. Of his father’s congregation Edmund wrote:

“But he soon lost confidence in the Plymouth Brethren also, and for the last thirty years of his life he was really unconnected with any Christian body whatever ... In those thirty years he scarcely heard any preacher of his own reputed sect; I am confident that he never once attended the services of any unaffiliated minister. He had gathered round him at St. Marychurch a cluster of friends, mostly of a simple and rustic order, to whom he preached and expounded, and amongst whom he officiated as minister and head. This little body he called “the church of Christ in this parish”, ignoring with a sublime serenity the claims of all the other religious institutions ...”³⁷⁷

Nevertheless the Gosse family life continued to exhibit many of the characteristics of Brethren households. For example, speaking of the study of the interpretation of biblical prophecy, Edmund Gosse wrote:

“Looking back it appears to me that this unusual mental exercise was almost their only relaxation, and that in their economy it took the place which is taken, in profaner families, by cards or the piano.”³⁷⁸

[216] Philip Gosse had embraced strongly Darby’s doctrine of the “any-moment” coming of Christ, and his son recalled that

376. William Townsend, *op. cit.* note 184, p. 38. This attitude towards divine guidance was not confined to the Brethren, but in their case it was exaggerated by their belief that the Holy Spirit guided them in a very direct way in worship. The impulsive and immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit therefore came to be taken for granted as an easy and natural possession, though they stopped short of claiming “inspiration”: cf. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 204–6.

377. Edmund Gosse, “Life of P. H. Gosse”, London 1890, p. 330.

378. Edmund Gosse, “Father and Son”, 8th edn. New York 1923, p. 72.

“... sometimes, when we parted for the night, he would say with a sparkling rapture in his eyes, ‘Who knows? We may meet next in the air, with all the cohorts of God’s saints!’”³⁷⁹

He was buoyed up until the very end of his life by this strong hope, and even during the last fortnight he said to his second wife:

“Oh darling, don’t trouble. It is not too late: even now the Blessed Lord may come and take us both up together.”³⁸⁰

Although Gosse had long since parted company with the Brethren, mainly it seems over the matter of “liberty of ministry”, this fervent Advent expectation was strongly characteristic of all sections of the Brethren. Like the Brethren, from whom he had clearly inherited most of his ideas, Gosse called his meeting-place “The Room”, and believers’ baptism was practised; when he had arrived in Devon, the meeting had been composed of only a few Cornish fishermen, but it flourished under him and by the 1880s there were over one hundred in fellowship. In February 1888, shortly before his death, Gosse recorded a significant judgement on the Brethren:

“The energy of the Holy Spirit in the assembly of the church was acknowledged and maintained to exist now in the same amplitude as in the apostolic age; and it was inferred that the liberty of ministry in the church at the present age is exactly that seen in 1 Cor. 14. In this I judge they were in error; for this supposes that the miraculous gifts are still extant, of which there is no evidence.”³⁸¹

This interesting reversal of the arguments often used in the early 1830s (217) to justify the expectation of the reappearance of miraculous gifts, was often supported in many minds by a much more practical observation: that the Brethren ideal of charismatic worship was only successful where several men of calibre were present in a meeting.³⁸² It is easy to see how Philip Gosse among his uneducated Cornish fishermen in the 1850s must have become disillusioned with this ideal, and as probably occurred in the case of Jukes at Hull a little earlier, the absence of other men in his meeting competent to minister ensured the rapid adoption by Gosse himself of the sole ministerial position. Gosse therefore takes his place alongside Jukes, Newton, Tregelles, and others who after some time in the Plymouth Brethren community, and while still sharing many of its ideals, parted company with the movement because of disillusionment with the Brethren’s attempt to re-create the charismatic ministry of the early church.

Passing on from matters of worship and personal religion, some brief comments are necessary about the attitude of the early Brethren towards society. In general, of course, this was felt to be irredeemably bad. At the very beginning of the movement the Plymouth soup-kitchen operated by Hall and Wigram is faint evidence of a social conscience, and in the late 1830s there was a sale of surplus furniture at Plymouth whose proceeds were devoted to philanthropic activity³⁸³, but on the whole the Brethren exhibited very

379. *ibid.* p. 323.

380. Edmund Gosse, “Life of P. H. Gosse”, London 1890, p. 372.

381. *ibid.* p. 377.

382. (265) *cf.* W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 92.

383. Chapman too had a soup-kitchen at Barnstaple for a time: F. Holmes, *op. cit.* note 11, p. 55.

little interest in improving society. Rather later in the century Darby wrote characteristically:

“The Christian has to form his own ways, and not expect to mend the world. There is no moral gain in its progress. We have telegraph and railway, very convenient no doubt; but are children more obedient, men happier ...?”³⁸⁴

{218} In the early days of the movement, however, there was a considerable amount of personal asceticism. Some of the more affluent Brethren refused to fill their homes with expensive furniture and carpets, and sometimes even tablecloths were eschewed.³⁸⁵ Chapman at Barnstaple insisted on living in a humble terrace house amongst the poor families to whom he ministered, and like Müller and Craik at Bristol he refused absolutely to incur debts.³⁸⁶ On the other hand, the Exclusive community after 1848 was on the whole a wealthy one; for example Wigram, who died in 1879, made bequests totalling £36,000 in his Will.³⁸⁷ This fact may be of some significance, for it has been pointed out that many of the men who became Exclusives were of independent means and therefore had leisure to engage in ecclesiastical controversy, in contrast with men like Müller and Craik who were preoccupied both with the pastoral ministry and with their social work.³⁸⁸ Whatever the explanation, it is the case that after 1848 the Exclusive Brethren withdrew increasingly into a quasi-monastic seclusion, and occupied themselves entirely with religious activities. Many of them felt that philanthropy was a “worldly” activity unworthy of Christian participation. Darby seems to have taken a more moderate view, but he did not actively support philanthropic activity.³⁸⁹ The stress among the Brethren on the imminence of the Second Advent must have assisted materially towards inhibiting a social programme. Spurgeon’s remark about the Brethren was well-known: “Ye men of Plymouth, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?” Among the Open Brethren after 1848 there were notable exceptions to the general absence of social conscience. Müller’s orphan work at Bristol is well-known; two prominent Open Brethren, {219} William Stokes, who had been involved in the Dublin origins³⁹⁰, and J. W. C. Fegan³⁹¹, were both instrumental in founding children’s homes; Thomas Barnardo was also associated with Open Brethren for nearly twenty years before joining the Church of England. Barnardo first came into contact with Open Brethren at the Stepney meeting in East London in 1866; he first started children’s work here, and opened his first orphan house in 1870. The greater social conscience and missionary effort among the Open Brethren was clearly connected with their evangelistic temper, while the reverse was generally true for the Exclusives.

Darby disapproved of temperance societies, because he felt that they attempted to take away the right of individual conscience and sought to impose another law; he wrote with some asperity about this matter in 1848.³⁹² He was more forthright in his declared

384. In a tract “The Sabbath – is the Law dead or am I?” n. d.

385. H. Groves, *op. cit.* note 85, p. 62; cf. Neatby, *op. cit.* p. 41.

386. F. Holmes, *op. cit.* note 11, pp. 38–9.

387. Copy of Will in the Sibthorpe Collection.

388. E. K. Groves, *op. cit.* note 364, p. 145.

389. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 270 & 197.

390. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, pp. 21–2.

391. *ibid.* pp. 187–192.

392. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III pp. 358–9 (letter of April 1848).

sentiments about Sunday observance, though again he stressed the principle that the Christian should not desire to impose upon a pagan world standards which have authority only for the believer:

“If my vote decided it (and happily for me I have none, and would not have or use one), not a train should run on Lord’s Day. As to excursions, they are a thorough curse to all engaged in them.”³⁹³

With regard to public duties, the Brethren avoided those wherever possible, though following Darby they did not interpret literally Christ’s prohibition of swearing, and therefore did not refuse to take oaths before magistrates.³⁹⁴ On the other hand Brethren of all sections did not vote. The earliest reference to this subject in Darby’s Letters is in 1848, when he wrote from Montpellier urging [Swiss?] Brethren not to {220} vote in the forthcoming elections:

“I write a line in haste, having at heart the course of the brethren with regard to these elections which are about to take place. I found that the brothers at V. had scarcely reflected at all on the bearing of an act which was making them take part in the course of the world ... It seems to me so simple that the Christian, not being at all of this world, but united to Him who died and rose again, has no business to mix himself up with the most declared activity of the world, by an act which affirms his existence as belonging to the world, and his identification with the entire system which the Lord is about to judge ...”³⁹⁵

When Lord Congleton took his seat in the Lords for a while in the 1860s he came in for a good deal of criticism from his Open Brethren friends³⁹⁶, and Darby wrote at the time of the second Reform Bill in 1867 a tract in which he linked the rise of democracy with the spread of Satanic power and infidelity:

“I need hardly assure your readers that I have no desire that they should meddle in politics; I do not do so myself, nor do I think that a Christian ought. He believes that God governs ... and will infallibly bring about His purposes.”³⁹⁷

A final witness to the strong puritan and quietist strain among the Brethren – especially the Exclusives – is afforded by Darby’s description written in answer to an enquiry from the Editor of the “Français”, a French Catholic newspaper, in 1878:

“We abstain from the pleasures and amusements of the world. If we have evening parties, it is for the purpose of studying the Word and of {221} edifying ourselves together. We do not mix in politics; we are not of the world: we do not vote. We submit to the established authorities, whatever they may be, in so far as they command nothing contrary to the will of Christ ...”³⁹⁸

393. J. N. Darby, *op. cit.* note 384.

394. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. II p. 127 (December 1870).

395. *ibid.* Vol. I pp. 159–161 (March 1848).

396. H. Groves, *op. cit.* note 85, p. 90.

397. “Progress of democratic power and its effect on the moral state of England”. This appears to have been originally written as a letter to a magazine or newspaper.

398. J. N. Darby, “A letter in reply to M. B.—, Editor of the “Français” respecting the Brethren”. Reprinted in *Coll. Writ.* and in H. A. Ironside, *op. cit.* note 109, Appendix B, pp. 188–195.

Rigid group endogamy was developed among the Exclusive Brethren, and even in the Open section marriage to a non-evangelical Christian was deplored. The family unit became a strong element in all sections of the Brethren, in the same way as among the Quakers, and Brethren affiliations tended to persist for several generations. Among the Exclusives persons travelling, or on holiday, or removing to a new home, carried "letters of commendation" from their home assembly to ensure their acceptance to communion by the local meeting. This practice was adopted to a lesser extent among Open Brethren, but it was never so vital, since in the case of a chance visit many meetings were prepared to accept a personal testimony to faith at the door, while for permanent admission the responsibility was entirely the local elders'.

As regards the secular occupations of the Brethren, the Open section was very heterogeneous although it never made much appeal to the working classes. Among the Exclusives most trades were represented, but of the professions few other than doctors and dentists, of which there were a large number.³⁹⁹ There was increasing prohibition among Exclusives, though not among Open Brethren, of membership of secular Societies, and Darby's Letters record in 1878 the excommunication of an Exclusive by his meeting for refusing to sever his connection with the Oddfellows' Society.⁴⁰⁰ The Exclusive Brethren became a completely self-contained community, {222} finding all their religious and social contacts and their recreation (such as it was) within their own ranks. It is very important to recognise, however, that the world-wide distribution of the community provided a strong counterbalance to this apparent narrowing of sympathies.⁴⁰¹

"Within their own limits they provided all the interests that their genuine adherents required. Beyond their mutual entertainment, they desired no social pleasures; beyond the honours that their own community could bestow, they had no ambition. And it must be said that if they seemed on the one hand to narrow their friendships, on the other they widened them indefinitely. The Brethren were spread over the face of the earth, and wherever one Brother was, there was the friend of any other."

Although detailed study of the development of the Brethren movement after the 1848 schism is outside the scope of this work, these brief descriptions, particularly of the Exclusive Brethren, are essential to an understanding of the forces involved in that schism, and indeed of the tensions latent in the Brethren movement from the very start. Similarly, no account of the movement up to 1850 would be complete without an attempt to do justice to the character of its greatest leader. In the account so far, Darby's harshness as an ecclesiastic and controversialist has of necessity dominated the scene; but this is very far removed from the memory of him cherished in many mutually-excommunicated circles of Exclusive meetings to the present day, where his letters and writings are constantly republished and possess an authority second only to that of the scriptures. In the Sibthorpe Collection are lovingly preserved his notes as a Law student in Dublin, his Ordination Certificate, a scrapbook {223} relating mainly to his travels, his Griesbach Bible and his annotated Bible, the briefcase he carried on his preaching tours, and numerous letters. Although he was associated prominently with a peculiar system of prophetic interpretation, simple Bible teaching was much more his wont, and if he was a bitter controversialist, he was also a man of deep personal piety. The contrast between these two sides of

399. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, pp. 271–2.

400. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. III pp. 180–1 (letter of August 1878).

401. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 276.

Darby's character was observed by Professor Herzog at Lausanne as early as 1845, when with reference to the origins of the Brethren in Switzerland he paid tribute to Darby as a fine pastor and Bible teacher, but said that as the leader of a party "il est décidément inférieur à lui-même."⁴⁰² The strife at Plymouth in 1845 gave an unfortunate opportunity for the development of Darby's potential as a controversialist, and the schism of 1848 for his emergence as the leader of a party. In 1850 Francis Newman, after acknowledging Darby's consistent devotion and powers of spiritual persuasion, wrote of him as follows:

"In his after-course (which I may not indicate) this gentleman has every where displayed a wonderful power of bending other minds to his own, and even stamping upon them the tones of his voice and all sorts of slavish imitation ..."⁴⁰³

In an article of October 1873 in the *Quarterly Review*, it was written of Darby as the leader of Exclusivism:

"As the leader of a religious party, he wields more power than all the bishops of England put together. He has attained, indeed, an influence and authority among the Brethren not to be found in any other Protestant community on earth."⁴⁰⁴

{224} When Darby died in April 1882, a special train took hundreds of mourners from London to his graveside at Bournemouth, and "The Times" devoted a whole column to an account of his life.

As a prose author, Darby was careless but powerful in style, though some of his writings show that he could be keenly critical if necessary. He entered the wider arena of theological polemic after the appearance of the "Essays and Reviews" in 1860, by publishing four "Dialogues" on them. One of these attacked Dr. Frederick Temple's essay on the education of the world, from the standpoint (shared by many evangelicals) of God's revelation versus man's fallen reason. Another of them dealt at length with the issues raised by geological discoveries, and from this it seems that Darby was well acquainted with the scientific facts. He appears to favour (a) the view that the "days" of Genesis 1 may represent long periods of time, and (b) the "chaos" theory that a whole geological cycle occurred between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1, thus explaining the existence of fossil remains; but he is careful not to commit himself, and lays all the emphasis on a humble Christian attitude to revelation.⁴⁰⁵ It is clear that Darby did not completely eschew intellectual studies, for late in life he translated the whole Bible into French and German (as well as producing his own English translation which is still used by Exclusives), could write in Italian, and possessed a very comprehensive library which warranted a special auction sale a few years after his death. His *Collected Writings* comprise about six million words. On the other hand Francis Newman's penetrating appraisal of him as he was in the late 1820s must be taken into consideration when attempting to form a complete {225} picture of Darby's attitude to secular thought:

"(Darby) had practically given up all reading except that of the Bible; and no small part of his movement towards me soon took the form of dissuasion from all other

402. J. J. Herzog, *op. cit.* note 274; character study of Darby at end of Ch. I.

403. F. W. Newman, *op. cit.* note 94, p. 33.

404. "Plymouth Brethrenism", pamphlet reprint from *Quarterly Review*, 1874.

405. Four "Dialogues on the Essays and Reviews" in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Apologetic Vol. II*; on geology, see esp. pp. 160–6.

voluntary study. In fact, I had myself more and more concentrated my religious reading on this one book: still, I could not help feeling the value of a cultivated mind. Against this, my new eccentric friend, (himself having enjoyed no mean advantages of cultivation) directed his keenest attacks. I remember once saying to him, in defence of worldly station, – “To desire to be rich is unchristian and absurd; but if I were the father of children, I should wish to be rich enough to secure them a good education.” He replied: “If I had children, I would as soon see them break stones on the road, as do anything else, if only I could secure to them the Gospel and the grace of God.” I was unable to say Amen, but I admired his unflinching consistency.”⁴⁰⁶

There is a particularly significant passage a little later in Newman’s account of his contact with Darby in Ireland:

“While pressing the authority of every letter of the Scripture with an unshrinking vehemence that I never saw surpassed, yet ... (Darby) showed more than indifference towards learned historical and critical evidence on the side of Christianity; and indeed, unmercifully exposed erudition to scorn, both by caustic reasoning, and by irrefragable quotation of texts. I constantly had occasion to admire the power with which he laid hold of the moral side of every controversy; whether he was reasoning against Romanism, against the High Church, against learned religion or philosophic scepticism: and in this matter his practical axiom was, that {226} the advocate of truth had to address himself to the *conscience* of the other party, and if possible, make him feel that there was a moral and spiritual superiority against him. Such doctrine, when joined with an inculcation of man’s natural blindness and total depravity, was anything but clearing to my intellectual perceptions ...”⁴⁰⁷

Newman was writing in 1850, and it would be very interesting to discover whether he had much knowledge of the recent controversies among the Brethren, for these comments illuminate remarkably Darby’s actions and publications at the time, in particular his tendency to characterise every difference of view in doctrine or practice as a moral issue. This attitude towards his opponents obscured any objectivity and made interpretation more weighty than facts. There is a straight line from Darby’s very first tract of 1827 to the Archbishop of Dublin, which invokes the explanation of Satanic influence no less than twenty times, to his liberal use of the same hypothesis in the late 1840s to explain the actions of those who differed from him.

There is no doubt that controversy narrowed Darby’s Christian sympathies, even if he continued to claim that the Exclusives met on unsectarian ground. In October 1832 he had written to Plymouth:

“This is the true secret of a church well ordered, perfect largeness of heart, as large as Christ’s ...”⁴⁰⁸

In January 1840 he wrote in similar vein from Geneva:

“I could not recognise an assembly that does not receive all the children of God, because I know that Christ receives them. I see the church in ruins: I follow my conscience according to the light that I {227} have received from the word, but I desire to

406. F. W. Newman, op. cit. note 94, pp. 28–9.

407. *ibid.* pp. 42–3.

408. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I p. 9.

bear with the weakness or lack of light that I may find in other Christians, and do all that I can to unite those who love the Lord.”⁴⁰⁹

These ideals seem to represent thoroughly what Groves believed to have been the original aspiration of the Brethren, and it can only be concluded that in Darby’s case their realisation fell victim to his even stronger, though perhaps largely inarticulate, desire that in its unity the true church should possess an authoritative voice.

To draw together finally much of what has been said about Darby as representative of the Plymouth Brethren movement, there were three main characteristics of his personal piety which stamped themselves indelibly on all sections of the community, both before and after 1848. The first was his intense expectation of the imminent personal return of Christ in the Second Advent, which coloured all Brethren worship and even their evangelistic preaching, and still does so to the present day. The second was his intense love and reverence for the words of the Bible as being God’s ultimate and infallible revelation to an otherwise hopelessly lost mankind; some words from the Preface to Darby’s reply of 1851 to Francis Newman’s autobiography “Phases of Faith” are transparent in the depth of their conviction on this matter:⁴¹⁰

“My joy, my comfort, my food, my strength, for near thirty years, have been the scriptures received implicitly as the word of God ... Did heaven and earth, the visible church, and man himself, crumble into nonentity, I should ... hold to the word as an unbreakable link between my soul and God.”

The third characteristic of Darby’s piety was his intense awareness of {228} the nearness and almost palpable reality of heaven. Some of his early hymns have already been quoted, and two quotations from his Letters will indicate the strength of this awareness. The first is from a letter of 1846, written from Plymouth during the strife there in French to some “sisters” at Lausanne:

“The troubles of this year have worn me a little; moreover, one is worn year by year if it pleases God, though His longsuffering is still salvation; may the time roll on still more quickly – my desires are fixed on the land of rest, this precious rest of God. My heart opens yet more to the thought of the glory, and of the rest that Christ is preparing for us, and I sigh for the moment, and with all my heart; my heart and my joy are there ...”⁴¹¹

The other quotation is from a letter of 1853, evidently to J. G. Deck, late of Weymouth and a great friend of Darby’s, who was emigrating to New Zealand after an illness.⁴¹² It is

409. *ibid.* p. 42.

410. {266} Preface to “The Irrationalism of Infidelity”, in *Coll. Writ. of J. N. D. Apologetic Vol. I* p. 8.

411. *Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I* p. 112.

412. H. Pickering (ed.), *op. cit.* note 21, p. 39. A most interesting record has survived of the content of a sermon by Darby on the subject of heaven, preached at the funeral of a boy of thirteen in 1845 at Weymouth. This must be almost the only surviving record of an actual sermon by Darby; as one might expect, he stressed the imminence of the prospect of Christ’s return and the consequent reunion of loved ones in glory. Augustus Clarke was the son of some English friends of Deck in India, and he had been placed in the care of the Deck family. He died after contracting an infection from an accident to his eye. See J. G. Deck, “Joy in departing: a memoir of the conversion and last days of Augustus James Clarke, who fell asleep in Jesus, May 2nd 1845 ...” 2nd edition, with additions, London & Weymouth 1847. As was the custom among the Brethren, Darby was referred to in the account of the funeral by his initials, as “our brother J. N. D.”

not difficult to see in this extract, as in many others of Darby's letters, the lonely bachelor; there are almost wistful references to Deck's home and family in the letter⁴¹³:

"I should have desired much to have kept you in England, if the Lord had so pleased. But if it be His will a little further or a little nearer, all is far, far off heaven, and all on the way thither; and heaven is near enough everywhere to make earthly distance nothing. I am, as few think, a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth ... I have no home – though countless mercies; on earth my home, for the home belongs to the heart, is the place of His will; for the rest, it will really be in heaven; and Montpellier, Düsseldorf, or New Zealand – what is the difference? ... I wait for heaven {229} and for Jesus, trusting He will give me to finish my course with His help through grace ... Here or there Jesus is the bond which no distance breaks, and no nearness can give without Him, and which will, blessed be His name, last for ever. He has thus united us: I thank Him, with more thanks than I should know how to give till I get to see Him in heaven. The rest is all just His will by the way ..."⁴¹⁴

Lest it should be thought that towards the end of his life Darby became embittered by controversy and arrogant through power, it is fitting to close with one more quotation, which betrays a man worthy of memory for more than the bitterness of his ecclesiastical conflicts. At the age of 81, a few months before his death, he wrote as follows to a young Exclusive couple in Canada who had recently been married:

"Surely there is a far higher and better bond, but as to circumstances the comfort each is to the other, and the sustaining help each is to the other, bind their hearts together; for life down here is made up of small things ... When we cleave to Him, all goes on smoothly in the heart, in the consciousness of His love ... You may be comparatively a young Christian, and I an old one; but He is all we want, each of us, and suited to each. You can have Him to keep you in the journey before you, and I can look back and see a patience and a faithfulness, a goodness beyond all my thoughts and all my praise. It is a sweet thought that in going on I am drawing near being with Him for ever. If spared, you have more of the toil of the way; with me it is almost over. You have a helpmeet, and I have trod it alone; but all is lost ... in His grace and faithfulness."⁴¹⁵

413. cf. W. B. Neatby, *op. cit.* note 36, p. 195.

414. Letters of J. N. D. Vol. I pp. 282–4.

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